



**GHALMADI SGIL DA ALOG XOSUU  
PASSIONS AND COLORED SLEEVES**

**BY**

**LIMUSISHIDEN and JUGUI**

**(LI DECHUN 李得春 AND LU WANFANG 鲁万芳)**





ASIAN  
HIGHLANDS  
PERSPECTIVES 7

GHALMADI SGIL DA ALOG XOSUU:  
GHUAISANGNI DURINA ROGSHDIGU  
MONGGHULNI ADAL

PASSIONS AND COLORED SLEEVES:  
MONGGHUL LIVES IN EASTERN TIBET

*lurijingi*

*a novel*

Limusishiden and Jugui  
(Li Dechun 李得春 *and* Lu Wanfang 鲁万芳)

ASIAN HIGHLANDS PERSPECTIVES 7

## EDITORIAL ASSISTANCE

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**Front Cover:** Zhaxi (right) was born in 1957 in Yomajaa Village, Wushi Town. He studied four years in the village primary school and was a shepherd before moving to work in a cement factory in Xining City at the age of eighteen. Five years later he was employed at the Huzhu Foodstuff Bureau in Huzhu County. In 2010, he lived in his home in Yomajaa Village, Wushi Town. Rnqan (b. 1957; left) is Mr. Zhaxi's relative. This photo was taken in Zhaxi's home in the summer of 1961 by a traveling commercial photographer from the Huzhu State Photo Studio, Weiyuan Town.

**Back Cover:** Sixty-nine (Liushijiu; 1908-1983), an illiterate peasant and well-known Mongghul folksong singer from Yomajaa Village. The photo was taken in his home in the summer of 1980 by a traveling commercial photographer.

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Rdo rje don 'grub འོ་རྩེ་དོན་འགྲུབ

Timothy Thurston

## ACCLAIM

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PASSIONS AND COLORED SLEEVES is a story of Mongghul society on the northeast Tibetan Plateau, in what is today called Huzhu Tu Autonomous County, the site of Gonlung Monastery, a historically important Gelukpa Tibetan Buddhist monastery. The book is not an account divided into western academic categories; instead it is a novel that presents the lives and times of real persons in real contexts. Its descriptions form a detailed vignette of northeastern Tibetan life. The complexity of the book is at once a challenge and yet its density is the project's strength – the reader must open his mind as a visitor to a foreign culture. There are no interpretive guides or scholarly structures to serve as intermediaries. It quickly becomes apparent that such guides and structures would categorize and thus obfuscate a remarkable and disappearing culture. This makes the project exceptional. This book might be compared to accounts in gazetteers, travelogues, and data-rich reports, as are found in works by Robert E. Ekvall, Li Anche, Louis Schram, and others.

PASSIONS AND COLORED SLEEVES records the Mongghul as they are and is valuable for scholars of religion who seek to understand how classical religions and rituals are assimilated and practiced in local contexts. This is well illustrated by the interface of Mongghul local religious sensibilities and rituals, the prominence of local *pram* deities, for example, and the religion of the Gelukpa Tibetan Buddhist but Mongghul-inhabited Gonlung Monastery, an institution with a strong orthodox Buddhist pedigree and strong connections to the Manchu court. Anthropologists and sociologists will be able to study the importance of local religious specialists, kinship, marriage patterns, end of life rituals, and authority structures as they were known and functioned in actual societies. The novel is clearly framed in specific times, places, and events, allowing historians to see the process of cultural change at work, and the gradual redefinition of Mongghul society in modern Chinese categories. The work is above all a compelling story of life



in the Tibetan highlands, in a complex confluence of cultures.

*Paul K Nietupski John Carroll University*

PASSIONS AND COLORED SLEEVES is amazing. Strikingly direct in delivery while almost overwhelmingly complex in detail, it guides the outsider through an unknown world of brutal struggles with nature, stark beauty, familial love, and mind-twisting myths and superstitions. The Mongghul authors, a married couple by the names of Limusishiden and Jugui, take the English-speaking reader on a journey so rare as to give new meaning to 'exotic'. *Lewis M. Simons, Pulitzer Prize winning journalist; author of WORTH DYING FOR and THE NEXT FRONT*

Limusishiden and Jugui provide a glimpse into a recollected, traditional world of Mongghul people in northeastern Qinghai Province. This complicated world is filled with spirits and ghosts causing disease and depression, marked with elaborate rituals for important events, punctuated by crude justice, and entirely enmeshed in a web of human relationships quite unlike those of any other place. These aspects, and others, are described with precision and care, and related in a matter-of-fact style that leaves the reader space to appreciate the ironies inherent in the juxtaposition of this world with our own. There is no better text for transporting the imagination into twentieth century Mongghul Qinghai. *Keith Dede, Associate Professor of Chinese, Lewis & Clark College*

Based on their extraordinary family history, this husband and wife team describe Mongghul cultural practices that are now nearly vanished. This, and the fact that it is written in English, make this novel unique. Spanning much of the twentieth century, the novel chronicles the lives of several individuals linked together by family ties, recovering lost memories through time and space. *Ha Mingzong, Charles University-Prague*

*"On the vast grassland and near this immense inland ocean, they seemed tiny and powerless but the power of their belief transformed them."* PASSIONS AND COLORED SLEEVES is a treasure that will expand your point of view by immersing you in another. The reader is gradually enticed into a rich tableau of domestic particulars, allowing privileged access to the Mongghul worldview and sensibilities. Rituals and beliefs which could otherwise be received as inextricably 'other' are here given life and meaning, allowing the reader to understand them on their own terms. This is a work of genius and enduring value. *Benedict Copps, MA-TESL; Seattle, Washington*

## INTRODUCTION

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This genre-bending work takes the novel down paths not often walked for it documents a dying culture by a couple of this cultural group, provides elaborate footnotes sure to interest the anthropologically-minded reader, has portions that are biography and history, and more. Its richly detailed description of folk and religious practices, family interactions and breadth in the number and types of scenes and vignettes provide valuable records of what was, or might have been.

The story is set in China's largest province – Qinghai – best known for Koknor, the great inland lake and, more recently, the devastating earthquake in Yushu in 2010. Within this vast land is situated Huzhu Mongghul (Tu) Autonomous County, where the characters in this novel dwell. Noted by nineteenth century Western explorers, the Tu are one of China's fifty-six official nationalities. Speaking a language with close links to Mongolian, the Mongghul are much influenced by Tibetan religion, while retaining, as this novel details, many complex folk religious beliefs and practices.

The novel begins a year before the advent of the twentieth century and ends a century later, spanning a time when Mongghul culture was vigorous to a time when much had been lost.

Women figure prominently in this work. The main character, Xjirimu, refuses to discipline one of her sons, who so brutally abuses his wife that she dies while fleeing the home. The dead woman's family exacts revenge that inspires Xjirimu to lead her ruined family to a new home in a wild, dangerous land where a wolf kills an infant left unattended as Xjirimu weeds nearby with her daughters.

Xjirimu is to repeat history. Her sole surviving son brings a wife, Zhualimaxji, into a home ruled by Xjirimu and her three daughters, each of whom have undergone a ritual that allows them to see men and have children while remaining unmarried. It is not the son, this time, who abuses his wife, but Xjirimu and the sisters. The wife flees. Where



she goes and her ensuing life is vividly described by the writers, who visited her in 2004. The runaway wife describes how much she missed her homeland to which she never returned: "I climbed the mountain behind my village and gazed at my ancestral home. I wanted to fly there." She died a month after the authors' visit.

Limusishiden and Jugui have accomplished something astonishing for they have taken us into a culture that only locals could write about so incisively, with such authority and compassion, and so unapologetically. In so doing they have created an enduring record of this vanishing culture.

## PREFACE

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### BREAD AND TEA: FOLKLORE IN A MONGGHUL FAMILY NARRATIVE

**L**imusishiden and Jugui spin a tale of a Mongghul family that spans a period from 1899 to the early twenty-first century. Never straying from a small cast of central characters, the narrative is woven from memories and experiences of the authors' families and an ethnographically 'thick' panoply of Mongghul folklore. Folk ideas and behavior patterns, including beliefs, attitudes, customs, humor, argument, affection, taboos, prejudices, bickering, shunning, black magic, social negotiation, revenge tactics, and concepts of space and time, are all delivered within the warp and weft of complex gender relations, kinship and fictive kinship ties (particularly 'sworn brothers') and age roles. The narrative is permeated with descriptions of folkloric items, practices, and techniques of transmission, including songs, dances, stories, rituals, agricultural lore, naming rituals, folk medicine, foodways, drinking initiations, costume, crafts, hunting techniques, festivals, games, life events of birth, coming of age, marriage/ availability, death, and sundry observations on material culture (pig bladders as coveted boys' toys at New Year's, for instance). The authors supply interpretive comments to carefully crafted situations that illustrate the dynamics of folk performance and social transactions, making something as complex as an antiphonal song exchange accessible to reading audiences unfamiliar with local meanings of such events.

This continuous cascade of cultural information flows across the pages as the authors relate life in the daunting spaces of east-central Qinghai Province. Without the thick description, the plot would be but a bundle of thin threads. Description is surface with little besides the narrator's telling to reveal a character's thoughts and motivations. Yet, in the weave of cultural context, feelings and motivations seem authentic and a sense of a Mongghul

worldview is communicated by a consensus of players, events, and reactions rather than through a deep probing of individual psyches. The descriptions of folklore and ritual, which at moments veer towards a 'magical realism' similar to that in the works of such Tibetan writers as Zhaxi Dawa and Alai, are not incidental to life – they are presented as part and parcel of lives lived within the embraces of family and community (Schiaffini-Verdani 2008:202-204).

In the first paragraphs of the tale, readers discover much about the culture of a Mongghul girl named Xjirimu who is sixteen years of age in 1899. Conflicted over social demands of greeting relatives during the New Year festival, yet with not a scrap of bread, or a cup of tea or liquor to take as gifts, this young woman is painfully aware of the low social station of her family. And as we learn the reasons why, we also learn much of the local culture:

Drought and hailstorms had decimated the crops they grew on twenty-five acres. Without harvests, she and her family collected wild herbs and begged to survive. Her husband, Dalaxja, had just returned home, his long woven bag empty after several days of begging outside the village. She did not scold him, understanding that just before the New Year festival period, nobody wanted anything to leave their hands or home.

In the passage we learn of the close dependence on basic skills to wrest a living from harsh, unforgiving land, and the back-up skills of foraging for wild plants. Begging with a long bag, her husband took off on treks away from home – the first instance of the theme of movement across a vast landscape that plays out in many instances throughout the book. Despite his failure, there is fatalistic acceptance of his fruitless toils – and he is spared a deserved cursing because of a mutual, unspoken understanding of the especially difficult context of begging at festival time.

Such passages, dense with meaning and told in an omniscient narrative voice, form the majority of the text, and hardly a sentence fails to inform an understanding of the time-chiseled lifestyle on the remote Qinghai Plateau. As the



plot unfolds, Xjirimu's family prospers for a few years, but due to wife abuse by a wastrel younger brother, her family is soon involved in a culturally sanctioned blood feud after the woman dies of her wounds when fleeing from home. The details of the negotiations reveal the rigorous rites of a society in which legal matters were decided among individual parties and in which rituals of serving food and drink embody self-defensive codes of respect and deference in the light of gross humiliation:

The avengers had no sympathy and, as custom dictated, Xjirimu's side could only submit to humiliation. An hour passed and the avengers were exhausted. The elders tried to calm them. Finally the 'guests' sat in the courtyard while neighbors served tea, bread, mutton, pork, and barley liquor. The 'guests' scolded, condemned, and spat. Some avengers ate, and then complained that the food was salty and hard to swallow. Others continued sobbing. They urinated everywhere in the courtyard. After dinner, discussions started and lasted the whole night accompanied by endless cursing. They refused to sleep. As they cursed, the people from Xjirimu's side served tea and liquor to them at regular intervals.

With the intervention of a maternal uncle who is a carpenter, Xjirimu moves the family to a plot of unclaimed land in an untouched forest of "pine, birch, and cypress" near a major regional monastery called Rgulang. Before leaving their home, she and her husband offer the sacrifice of a sheep to the local protector deity (*pram*) who confers on them a token by which to call on its powers in their new locale, which soon grows into a village with the addition of many new families. Despite the move, more crises and much drama eventually follows, beginning with wolves killing an untended child in the fields, after which a simple form of 'sky burial' is held and the tiny corpse is eaten by vultures. The death is an immediate blow to Xjirimu's mental health and necessitates the ritual killing of a chicken to call back her wandering soul.

Key aspects of the story involve Xjirimu's three daughters, who are prepared for marriage by being trained in embroidery, folksong singing (especially wedding songs and funeral lamentations), and field and house work. Despite this preparation, her daughters eventually assume the status of the ritually-sanctioned *tulighui juuligha*, or women who forego normal marriages. The eldest daughter has no interest in her suitors and wishes to stay with her parents. Another marries, but is grossly insulted after failing one day to wear her traditional headdress in the fields, only to have her father-in-law place it on the head of a donkey. The third sister meets a handsome young man at a mask-dance ritual, but later is forced to break off the engagement once it is discovered the groom's family has a history of body odor – a strong taboo among many peoples in western China, including the Nuosu (Yi) of southern Sichuan province.

According to Mongghul custom, *tulighui juuligha* took at will any interested males for temporary 'husbands' during discrete night visits in their chambers. This practice is somewhat reminiscent of the 'walking marriage' customs of the Mosuo people of Lake Lugu on the borders of northeast Yunnan and southern Sichuan made famous by Yang Erche Namu's *Leaving Mother Lake: A Childhood on the Edge of the World* (Namu and Mathieu 2003). In the Mongghul system *tulighui juuligha* choose to stay in their maternal home, along with the children they eventually bear.

A thread directly affected by the behavior and attitudes of the sisters is that of the malleable Sixty-nine, Xjirimu's son, who seeks out famous folk singers to become an accomplished singer. After his father's death, he takes a lovely female singer named Zhualimaxji as a wife. An antiphonal song exchange during their courting references two star-crossed lovers from Mongghul folklore and demonstrates attitudes towards livestock and herding in the culture. In one of many examples of folk literature woven within the narrative, Zhualimaxji sang:

Larinbog, brother from the valley,  
Qiminsuu, sister from the plain,  
Drive hundreds of mares to mix with hundreds of colts,

Drive hundreds of cows to mix with hundreds of calves,  
Drive hundreds of ewes to mix with hundreds of lambs.

Sixty-nine sang:

Qiminsuu, sister from the plain,  
Larinbog, brother from the valley,  
Drive hundreds of mares to mix with hundreds of colts,  
Drive hundreds of cows to mix with hundreds of calves,  
Drive hundreds of ewes to mix with hundreds of lambs.

Despite ironic family resistance to Sixty-nine's bride being a *tulighui juuligha*, he marries her and attempts to integrate her and her two daughters (one by another man) into his maternal home. His efforts fail, however, as the bride is unrelentingly set upon by his sisters and ultimately refuses to stay. In one passage the centrality of food in Mongghul culture is vividly highlighted in the trivial, jealous torments visited upon the unwanted wife when she is wrongfully accused of eating too much bread and defends herself to Sixty-nine, who is torn between the competing women's agendas:

Zhualimaxji said, "Nonsense! She was eating chicken and hid it from me when I entered. Our big red rooster had vanished. Your sisters shared it with their men. I saw this with my own eyes that night. Your mother was eating some left by her daughters. They hid bread from me and gave it to their visitors. They didn't give me anything the night I returned tired and hungry from the fields, to find only a little broth left in the pot. Who wouldn't be angry to be treated like that?"

Such drama-filled passages give nuance to the status of *tulighui juuligha* and insight into the varying roles, patterns of interaction, and social pressures of Mongghul women and the consequences to family life.

A major thread in the latter half of the story recounts Zhualimaxji's desperate travels in search of an ideal place to settle down. After the death of her first daughter from a

swollen abdomen, a second try at life in Xjirima's home becomes unbearable. Zhualimaxji returns briefly to her maternal home, then sets out on a long trek with her small daughter, walking towards a far-off place beyond Rgulang Monastery, beyond the fabled Jilo River. Readers are treated to intimate descriptions of flora and fauna as they traverse the landscape. Early in her quest Zhualimaxji meets an old Mongghul woman who tells her adventures of the Tibetan hero, King Gesar, which she had learned from her Tibetan husband:

"I heard King Foorigisigari once defeated King Gesar in battle and stole King Gesar's lovely wife. Right?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"True! King Gesar left to suppress a rebellion in a faraway place. Finally, his followers thought he must have died on the battlefield. It was then that King Foorigisigari stole his first wife, the one Gesar loved most. Later, when King Gesar returned after suppressing the rebellion, he learned his wife had been kidnapped. He immediately went to King Foorigisigari's land to ask for his wife, and got her back without difficulty. Afterwards, the two sides lived in harmony and frequently contacted each other, though they had countless battles before," the old woman said knowledgeably.

With the portentous Gesar tale as charter and begging for bread and tea as she goes, Zhualimaxji begins a series of encounters with displaced Mongghul families (with whom she begs refuge at night), coal handlers, traders, soldiers, pilgrims, and lamas. At one point she nearly trades her child to a Muslim man for a few swatches of cloth. Eventually she encounters a poor but hardworking Han Chinese miller covered in white cornmeal dust who, despite linguistic and cultural barriers, lends her compassion and eventually his love. The ethnic complexity and ethos of the Qinghai borderlands is revealed in her adventures and travails.

Though Sixty-nine nearly recovers her, she hides at word of his coming and stays with her Han Chinese lover. Her former husband returns home and finds another folk

singer, who happens to be a *tulighui juuligha*, just before the People's Republic of China is founded and a new era of Mongghul culture begins.

The narrative ends in 2004, in a triumphant period of national revival after decades of political chaos and social disruption. Authors Limusishiden and Jugui interview a decrepit Zhualimaxji, hoping for memories of faded cultural traditions and a glimpse of her treasured traditional clothes. Yet, the memories are dim and she had burned her clothes just a few years before, being the last Mongghul speaker in her area.

...

In the depiction of Sixty-nine learning to sing Mongghul folksongs there is a highly reflexive passage that could just as well be Limusishiden and Jugui speaking to present generations of Mongghul whose culture has been diluted by the inevitable forces of acculturation, modernization, and globalization. The experienced tradition-bearer advises the young singer that:

Learning folksongs is not just to sing. It is also important that you learn Mongghul history and culture through songs. Many singers cannot explain them well. Our people use no written language and our ancestors could not record our culture over the countless years of our history. How sad! Many of our songs are also sung in Tibetan. These are hard to learn, because we cannot speak Tibetan. The songs sung in Mongghul are easier for us to understand and reflect our history. For example, 'Tangdarihgiiima' is sung whenever people drink together. It reminds us of how our ancestors lived.

And that statement of purpose is very much what this book is about.

*Mark Bender*  
*The Ohio State University*

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## PEOPLE<sup>1</sup>

Name	Sex	Birthplace	Born	Died	Relationship to Jugui
Dalaxja	M	Yomajaa Village, Donggou TS	1880	1939	Jugui's mother's father's father
Xjirimu	F	Yomajaa Village	1883	1958	Jugui's mother's father's mother
Rnqaxji	F	Yomajaa Village	1904	1978	Jugui's mother's father's eldest sister
Durijixji	F	Yomajaa Village	1906	1988	Jugui's mother's father's elder sister
Zhualimaxji	F	Duwa Village, Wushi T	1917	2004	Jugui's mother's mother
Schin	M	Smeen Village, Wushi T	1909	1978	Jugui's father
Sixty-nine	M	Yomajaa Village	1908	1983	Jugui's mother's father
Sanjii	F	Yomajaa Village	1916		Jugui's mother's father's younger sister
Majii	F	Xewarishidi Village, Wushi T	1920	1990	Jugui's mother's father's lover
Danjansuu	F	Yomajaa Village	1936		Jugui's mother
Layahua	F	Yomajaa Village	1940		Jugui's mother's younger sister

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<sup>1</sup> TS = township, T = town

Name	Sex	Birthplace	Born	Died	Relationship to Jugui
Shdanzinniima	M	Xewarishidi Village	1948		Jugui's mother's father's lover's son
Liminsuu	F	Yomajaa Village	1948	2005	Jugui's mother's father's younger sister's (Sanjii) daughter (Shdanzinniima's wife)
Zhaxi	M	Yomajaa Village	1957		Jugui's brother
Rnqan	M	Yomajaa Village	1957		Jugui's mother's father's elder sister's (Durijixji) son
Niruu	M	Yomajaa Village	1954		Jugui's mother's father's younger sister's (Sanjii) son
Limusishiden	M	Tughuan Village, Danma Town	1968		Jugui's husband
Jugui	F	Yomajaa Village	1969		Danjansuu's daughter and Limusishiden's wife
Danzhinjansuu	M	Xewarishidi Village	1977		Jugui's mother's father's lover's grandson



LIMUSISHIJI'S MISERABLE DEATH

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It was the last day of the twelfth lunar month of 1899 in Yomajaa Village in the overpopulated east-central part of what would later become China's northwestern Qinghai Province. Xjirimu was sixteen years old. She did not sleep, worrying that her family should pay New Year visits to her father-in-law and other village elders. If they went, they would have to go empty-handed for they had nothing to give – no bread, no homemade liquor, no tea. Xjirimu was sure no other home in the world could be poorer than hers.

Drought and hailstorms had decimated the crops they grew on twenty-five acres. Without harvests, she and her family collected wild herbs and begged to survive. Her husband, Dalaxja, had just returned home, his long woven bag empty after several days of begging outside the village. She did not scold him, understanding that just before the New Year festival period, nobody wanted anything to leave their hands or home. Rather, it was a time to call in outstanding loans. Goods and cash flowing into the home augured well for the coming year; property and goods leaving the home portended a loss of fortune.

Xjirimu got up early and blew alive several embers from the kitchen hearth where she banked a fire every night. She dipped a twisted wick in a saucer of sesame oil, lit it, and returned to her room, where her son was whimpering from a growling, empty stomach. She comforted him and decided to seek help from her own mother's home, a few hundred meters away in the same village. During her visit, her mother generously gave her a piece of highland barley bread big enough for a family meal.

The hours crept by. Well into the morning of the first day of the first lunar month, Xjirimu and her family sadly and hopelessly stayed at home. It was shameful to not pay a

New Year visit to her father-in-law and other elders on the first day of this key Mongghul festival, but there was nothing she could do about it. When members of their clan visited, later that day, all she could offer was boiled water. At the end of the day she had collected thirteen pieces of baked bread – gifts from the visitors. That bread, plus what her mother had given her that morning, lasted a full month.

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Three years passed and Xjirimu's luck turned. The land yielded bumper harvests, testimony to favorable weather and hard fieldwork. Her family was then able to build rooms made from wood cut from nearby forests, replacing the crude rooms they had lived in. More years passed and they had plenty of mules, horses, and sheep and their storeroom was packed with highland barley, beans, and flax. They were a happy and prosperous village family.

This was not to continue. Xjirimu's oldest son, Forty-nine,<sup>2</sup> began gambling day and night, refused to work in the fields, and squandered a great deal of silver. Creditors came to the home, demanding that they pay Forty-nine's gambling debts. Xjirimu pleaded with her son to stop gambling but to no avail.

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<sup>2</sup> Grandparents often give names to their grandchildren during the morning of a child's birth celebration one month after it is born. If the grandfather is absent, the grandmother gives the name. It is common for the child to be named in accordance with the grandfather's age. For example, a grandson born when his grandfather is sixty-nine, is given the name Liushijiu, the Chinese for 'sixty-nine', celebrating the grandfather's age. It was unusual to find a male with a name based on Mongghul numbers in 2008. However, such names were common for girls e.g., Jiransuu, where *jiran* is 'sixty'. *Suu* has an unclear meaning in Mongghul but is a common suffix in Tibetan for a female name meaning 'lake' (*mtsho*). The name Jiransuu suggests she was born when one of her grandparents was sixty years old. Other common female names include Dalansuu (*dalan* 'seventy') and Nayansuu (*nanyan* 'eighty').

One day, two of Forty-nine's gambling companions stole two of Xjirimu's best horses from the home. Dalaxja was furious and beat Forty-nine so badly that he lay in bed for several days. When he recovered, he eagerly resumed gambling, but was duly afraid of his father. This was a time when the regional warlord, General Ma Bufang,<sup>3</sup> was recruiting and Forty-nine enlisted.

When Dalaxja learned this, he went to his son's army camp in Luojiawan<sup>4</sup> and looked for a Mongghul surnamed Lu from today's Wushi Town who was a high-ranking official. Dalaxja succeeded in meeting him and, after paying a hundred copper coins, was able to take his son home.

Forty-nine soon resumed his old ways and continued losing money, despite his father's beatings. Because he was frequently threatened by the people to whom he owed huge debts and because he was afraid of his father's beatings, he resolved to join the army a second time. He put a packet of medicinal herbs on his mother's bed before leaving, hoping they would relieve her persistent cough.

Xjirimu received a letter from Forty-nine two years later that only said, "Dear Mother, I want very much to see you." Forty-nine was illiterate and Xjirimu knew someone had written the letter for him. This was the first and last word Xjirimu received from her son.

When Dalaxja's younger brother, Limuxja, reached marriageable age, Xjirimu and her husband searched high and low for a suitable bride. When they eventually found one, Xjirimu ensured the girl's family was committed to the marriage. The two sides had a common relative; one of Dalaxja's younger sisters had married into the prospective bride's home. They then sent a matchmaker to Dalaxja's sister's home, located in today's Danma area. With the sister's help, Limusishiji's parents quickly consented and the

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<sup>3</sup> 1903-1975. See [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ma\\_Bufang](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ma_Bufang) for more on Ma.

<sup>4</sup> Located in the eastern suburbs of Xining City in 2008.

wedding festivities were held on a propitious day of the first lunar month as chosen by the Xjirimu Village *pram*.<sup>5</sup>

This union proved a difficult marriage. The couple were of different temperament and when they quarreled, which was often, Limuxja beat Limusishiji viciously, who then fled to her parents' home. Time passed and Xjirimu would visit Limusishiji's home and ask her to return. Xjirimu was genuinely kind to Limusishiji, knowing her value to the family. She made a magnificent, colorful traditional Mongghul woman's headdress for her; gave her gold earrings; offered her the best food; provided her with thread and other sewing articles; and gave permission for her to visit and stay in her parents' home longer than was the case for many young wives.

One night during a bitter fight on their bed, Limuxja beat Limusishiji's naked body so severely that she bled.

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<sup>5</sup> The *pram* is a deity represented in the form of a sedaned image or a cloth-covered pole held by four men or a single man, respectively. The *pram* permeates Mongghul village life. It is available for consultation and represents the possibility that supplicants' distresses may be alleviated. It is consulted to identify a suitable spouse, treat illness, exorcise evil, ensure well-being and good harvests, and alleviate droughts. In the case of a sedaned *pram*, moving forward is affirmative while moving backwards is negative. Pole *pram* move up and down in the hands of those who hold them to signify a positive answer. *Pram* communicate through interaction between an elder who asks the *pram* questions and a man who holds the sedan poles and, in the case of a pole *pram*, who holds the pole.

*Pram* may belong to an individual household or be shared by a village. Each household has a commodious *pram* room in the family compound of several adobe rooms built around tall, tamped-earth enclosing walls. The *pram* wears a Chinese-style unlined upper garment and then is draped in a monk's robe. Clothing colors include red, yellow, pink, and green.

More generally, *pram* means 'deities'.

Xjirimu was awakened by Limusishiji's terrified shrieks, got up, and stopped the conflict.

Limusishiji fled a few days later when her wounds were nearly healed. An itinerant trader told Xjirimu that he had seen Limusishiji walking to Jiloghuali. Xjirimu believed him because he regularly visited in a horse-drawn cart, trading coal for grain. Jiloghuali had little cultivated land. It was a place for criminals, gamblers, and for those fleeing forced conscription into General Ma Bufang's army. People there had little food.

Limusishiji was weak from the terrible beating, worried, depressed, and had a bad cough and fever. She died not long after reaching Jiloghuali. Limuxja and Rashidan, a man from their home village, reached Jiloghuali a few days after Limusishiji died and were terrified when they located her corpse. They knew her death meant disaster would soon come from Limusishiji's family in the form of unforgiving revenge as dictated by the ancient custom of *renming*.<sup>6</sup> The wounds on Limusishiji's body were indisputable testimony

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<sup>6</sup> Taking revenge by destroying a home and demanding compensation for a dead daughter. In 2008, the *renming* system continues in Mongghul areas. If a young woman commits suicide in her husband's home by, for example, hanging herself, drinking pesticide, or drowning after being maltreated by her husband or mother-in-law, the husband's side sends a man to the woman's parents' side to inform them of the death. A meeting is then held in the dead wife's parents' home. Several representatives are chosen from among maternal uncles, brothers, and men of the same clan to visit the dead woman's husband's home to exact revenge. In deference to the legal system, avengers dare not destroy the home nor ask for compensation as in the past. Rather, they insist that the family invite many monks to chant scriptures for the deceased. They know that a feast must be provided to all mourners, five to ten RMB must be given to participants on the morning that the corpse is moved to the cremation ground, and so on. The dead woman's side is also conscious that the woman's children will be cared for by the father and this also tempers their behavior.

that Limuxja had brutally beaten her, as was the reason for her flights to her parents' home.

Limuxja squatted by the corpse and burst into wails, covering his face with his hands, "Great Heaven! What should I do now? What terrible disaster will befall my family?"

"Don't wail. It won't help, not even a little. What shall we do with the corpse?" Rashidan said.

"Why shouldn't I moan? Her relatives will take revenge. My family has had a good life for only a few years. Before that we had nothing. We will surely sink back into terrible poverty," Limuxja lamented.

"Well, she's gone now. Maybe they won't take revenge," Rashidan encouraged.

"My wife's relatives include many strong men. They know we often quarreled. Her parents and brothers reluctantly sent her back to my home. They finally agreed only because Xjirimu treated her well and asked her to return. Her family hates me. They will surely destroy my family," Limuxja said.

"Regardless, we must deal with the corpse," Rashidan said and pulled Limuxja up. They then discussed how to transport the corpse back to Yomajaa Village. They had come on foot with no cart. They finally covered the corpse with dirt on a nearby slope and decided to return home, inform Limusishiji's family, and gauge the reaction. If her parents demanded to see the corpse, then they would have to haul it back.

Limuxja understood that this was the worst thing that would ever happen in his life – a young woman had died in his home because of his abuse. All his family members and their property, including their home, were now at the mercy of Limusishiji's relatives.

## THE DESTRUCTION OF XJIRIMU'S HOME

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In keeping with custom, Limuxja, Dalaxja, and all their clan members met in Xjirimu's home, and then dispatched two men to Limusishiji's home to inform them that their daughter had died while fleeing to Jiloghuali.

Xjirimu's relatives were consumed with worry. They knew disaster was imminent unless Limusishiji's parents, maternal uncles, and clan, through a miracle they could not envision, relinquished the idea of destroying the family. Limuxja's clan invited three village deities, each in their own sedan, from the village temple to Xjirimu's home to divine what they should prepare and how to prevent, or at least reduce, the coming storm.

The family sacrificed a sheep, burnt incense, and prostrated to the deities, who through a spirit medium, indicated a site about twenty meters from their home gate where they dug a pit and placed an iron arrow, pointing toward Limusishiji's home. The pit was then filled with soil and pounded hard with a heavy stone to prevent the arrowhead from changing direction – an arrow pointing in the wrong direction could not protect against evil intrusions.

A large black pot was taken from the kitchen, upturned, placed atop the covered pit, and fixed tightly by soil around the rim. Finally, a heavy flat stone was placed atop the pot. Three monks were invited to the home to chant scriptures, to better ensure family security. Finally, all the village elders gathered in Xjirimu's home and recited scriptures, while three monks chanted on the *pei*.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Traditionally, Mongghul used a *pei* in the kitchen, which was divided into two parts by the *langang* or low wall. The first part was for cooking, and the other half was the *pei*, or raised platform. The *pei* was where all the family slept at night (using fur-lined robes as quilts); and entertained guests

Young men energetically discussed how to lessen damage to the home, what livestock to hide where, and how to stop Limuxja and his family from being beaten. Xjirimu was ordered to squat in a corner of the yard dumbly and lifelessly. Tears flowed from her face when she reflected on her bitter life. She knew what the outcome would be in a few days.

Meanwhile, Limusishiji's family agonized when they heard the news from the two messengers Xjirimu sent. Just as Xjirimu predicted, they demanded to see the corpse regardless of its condition. They said their daughter's husband was completely responsible for her death and told the two men to return only when they brought her corpse.

Limuxja and two other men went with a horse-drawn cart to fetch the corpse from Jiloghuali. Meanwhile, the whole clan began preparing for impending doom with specific assignments – distill barley liquor, prepare steamed bread, and grind highland barley in water mills. A specific team hid some of Xjirimu's family's belongings, and the best livestock were sent to trusted clan members' homes.

When Limuxja and his companions reached the burial site, they found that wild animals had pulled the corpse from the shallow pit it had been buried in and had eaten much of it. The remains were put in a long woven bag

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with food, liquor, and conversation. The *pei* was made of adobe bricks and warmed by heat from the kitchen fire passing through channels to the chimney or a fire fueled by animal dung and straw that burned in the center of the *pei*. People sat around the fire atop the *pei* during winter and boiled tea over a smoky, tear-inducing blaze. The *pei* was wonderful in winter when felt rugs were spread on it. Folded and piled covers and skins used at night were stacked along the wall where, also, a few different-sized wood chests were lined up containing the family's clothes and the mother's treasures (needle box, sewing materials, and so on), *taligha* (roasted highland barley flour), home-distilled liquor, utensils, and there was also a small cupboard. Hanging on pegs along the wall were a gun, a stringed musical instrument, and clothes.



and carted back home. The two men previously dispatched were sent to Limusishiji's home to inform them that the corpse had been brought back.

After the two men left Limusishiji's parents' home, her family invited their maternal and paternal uncles, and other clan members to their home. Everyone was extremely agitated at the news of Limusishiji's woeful death and, between laments, discussed how to take revenge.

About forty men from Limusishiji's side started off from her parents' village the next day, including two of Limusishiji's maternal uncles, three paternal uncles, father, brothers, adult males from her clan, and one representative from each village household. Mounted on horses, they arrived at Xjirimu's village at lunchtime. All Xjirimu's clan members knelt in front of the courtyard gate in lines to greet the 'guests' – the avenging group. Xjirimu knelt at the head of the lines. Four elders greeted them with an offering of barley liquor in small wood bowls, most of which was refused by the enraged guests. The guests' horses were led to the stable once they entered Xjirimu's courtyard.

They refused tea and bread and directly entered the bedroom where the corpse had been placed. Some immediately burst into loud lamentations because of the horrible, dismembered condition of the corpse. The chief maternal uncle immediately demanded that a *hguandii*<sup>8</sup> be brought to expel evils from her body.

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<sup>8</sup> A *hguandii* begins his study of Buddhist scriptures inside 108 tents in an uninhabited place, encapsulated in such expressions as '*qulangshidari so*' 'sit by a well and learn scriptures in tents'. The *hguandii* sits crossed-leg for long periods in the course of learning scripture and his master's magic arts. *Hguandii* are capable of both good and evil; they summon and command evil. In certain circumstances, a *hguandii* might expel evil from an ailing person's body. They also can send illness to a certain person. A female body part strengthens their magic power. Consequently, *hguandii* fasten the hair of a young dead woman to their own hair. An eighteen-year-old girl's foot-bone is regarded as a potent weapon in expelling evils, while a girl's flesh is considered a

The *hguandii* arrived and began exorcising the evils in Limusishiji's corpse. He feverishly brandished his sword while reciting incantations. He cut a small piece of flesh from the hips of the corpse, which he swallowed, and cut a tuft of hair, which he fastened on his sword handle. The recited incantations expelled the evil bound to Limusishiji's corpse that might harm living people, particularly those from her parent's side who first saw her after her death, as well as adversely affecting her next incarnation.

The *hguandii* finished his rituals, and the victim was left on the sleeping platform to be buried after the troubles had been solved and permission for burial granted by the girl's maternal uncle. The horrible mangled condition of the corpse made the avengers clench their fists in fury. Without accepting any food, the maternal uncle suddenly sobbed, "We came to see our girl! Your family mistreated her and now you must take responsibility for her death!" He and his followers then proceeded to smash all the windows, doors, tables, benches, jars, tools, furniture, bowls, and pots in the home. The family livestock that had not been hidden were beaten to death or escaped through the front gate. Children screamed. Xjirimu, Dalaxja, and other senior clan members squatted in the courtyard corners quietly. Other family members prostrated and begged for mercy.

The avengers had no sympathy and, as custom dictated, Xjirimu's side could only submit to humiliation. An hour passed and the avengers were exhausted. The elders tried to calm them. Finally the 'guests' sat in the courtyard while neighbors served tea, bread, mutton, pork, and barley liquor. The 'guests' scolded, condemned, and spat. Some avengers ate, and then complained that the food was salty and hard to swallow. Others continued sobbing. They urinated everywhere in the courtyard. After dinner, discussions started and lasted the whole night accompanied by endless cursing. They refused to sleep. As they cursed, the people from Xjirimu's side served tea and liquor to them at regular intervals.

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*hguandii's* delicious food. They polish their bone weapons on the bones of dead young girls.

The next day, the 'guests' were served three courses of tea, bread, noodles, and stacks of mutton and pork as they continued scolding Xjirimu's family. At night they were exhausted, because they had not slept the previous night. They were invited to neighboring homes, where they were treated respectfully with hot tea and barley liquor and slept on heated beds.

The avenging group continued to eat, drink, and curse on the third, fourth, and fifth days. The maternal uncle refused to announce his conditions for settling the problem, despite the attempts of senior men from Xjirimu's clan. Finally, the maternal uncles demanded that Xjirimu's side kill a hog, two sheep, and a cow each day during the time they were in Xjirimu's home and also provide the best food and liquor.

On the sixth day, Limusishiji's maternal uncles demanded that Limuxja present himself. This was impossible, for he would be severely beaten and perhaps even killed. The 'guests' were told that Limuxja had fled and no one knew where he was. In fact, he had hidden in a clan member's home. The 'guests' understood this was a lie and, when they got drunk, rushed into every room looking for something to destroy, and smashed what tables, bowls, and liquor jars had earlier escaped destruction. Two men in the kitchen broke the stove platform and all the pots.

On the seventh day, the key maternal uncle finally announced his conditions: the most important Living Buddha of Rgulang Monastery<sup>9</sup> and eighteen monks would pray for fourteen days for the victim, two large containers of butter would be offered, and much silver would be given to the monastery and the victim's family in atonement. In addition, two excellent horses and an ox were to be given to them when they left.

Xjirimu's side knew these demands were wildly extravagant. Meanwhile, village elders persuaded the most

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<sup>9</sup> Dgon lung, Dgon-lun, Erh-ku-lung, Yu-ning si, Youning si is located in today's Wushi Town, Huzhu Mongghul Autonomous County, Qinghai Province. In 2006, it had 280 monks, all of whom were Mongghul.

influential 'guests' to enjoy a quiet night in different homes, aiming to persuade them to settle for much less.

The maternal uncles and Limusishiji's brothers refused. Finally, Xjirimu came before the maternal uncles and beseeched them to reduce their demands based on her kindness to Limusishiji. This struck a responsive chord. The maternal uncles and Limusishiji's brothers knew Xjirimu had been very kind to Limusishiji. In the end, they agreed to reduce their requirements by half.

The avenging group left on the ninth day with a settlement. The emptied home was in a state of awful destruction and Xjirimu's family was now burdened with heavy debt. These tragic events deeply depressed the family.

Limuxja felt terribly guilty that his misdeeds had caused his family such agony. He could not face his sister-in-law and his brother, although they never complained, and left, never to return. Some said he was in Jiloghuali, herding sheep and living in a black yak hair tent with a Tibetan woman. He spoke Tibetan well, they said, and went daily to a Tibetan monastery to chant. He had become a pious Tibetan Buddhist.

Limuxja's departure pained Xjirimu even more. She felt the future held no hope or support. Then three children died in succession from smallpox. Later, Xjirimu received a letter that said, "We write this letter to inform you that your son, Forty-nine, died in the battle of Dalapai."<sup>10</sup> These disasters convinced Xjirimu that the home was in an evil place and that they should move, otherwise her three surviving daughters and son would meet tragic ends. She wanted to move far away and never see the place where she had been frustrated, and where she would never hear mention of Yomajaa Village.

One morning she declared to Dalaxja, "We have nothing except these enclosing walls and this empty courtyard. Limuxja is gone. Our village *pram* says he won't return. You have no brothers to help us. What should we do?"

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<sup>10</sup> Location unclear.

"What can we do but restart our lives? Our *pram* will help if we offer much incense and piously prostrate daily," Dalaxja said.

"I'm so disappointed. I will die if we don't leave. There was nothing in your home when I married you. We couldn't fill our bellies. We had not a single piece of bread to bring to our elders' homes on the first day of that awful New Year. I was so humiliated, I couldn't face the villagers. Our family was one of the poorest in the world. Later Great Heaven bestowed good harvests that, added to our hard work, made us a rich family. Limuxja's failed marriage has emptied our home again. Our heavy debts make me hopeless. Our home is full of evil. I worry about our four children. I will die if we stay here. Disaster will surely befall us if we don't move elsewhere," Xjirimu said.

"What will we do when we meet trouble? Our village *pram* can protect us here," Dalaxja said. Dalaxja's every effort to persuade her to stay failed.

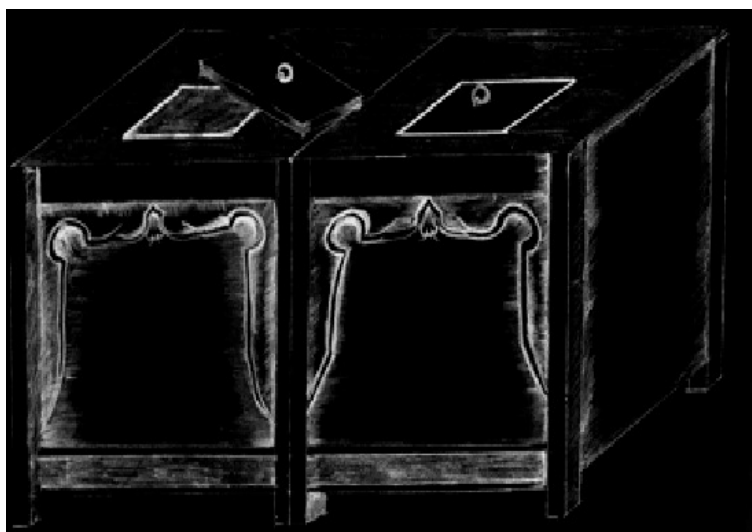
Xjirimu's ideal destination was Jiloghuali. Xjirimu's uncle, a well-known carpenter in the Mongghul area who spent most of his time in Rgulang Monastery, had dedicated his life to doing carpentry work for the monastery. He stayed at the monastery for most of the year and in return received food and accommodation. He worked piously for his next incarnation. He was one of several carpenters devoting their lives to the holy monastery. He had worked there long enough to establish good relationships with the monks, monastery leaders, and living Buddhas. He understood Xjirimu's situation and her plan to move to Jiloghuali and wanted to help her come settle on a piece of the monastery's large area of uncultivated land.

Xjirimu was delighted to hear that her uncle had gotten the monastery's permission for her family to settle on forested land near Rgulang. Xjirimu was eager to leave as soon as possible. Her plan was confirmed by her village *pram*, which made her confident her family would make a better life, even though they would have to start anew and work hard. She was glad to work in fields belonging to Rgulang and planned to delight all the monastery deities by offering grain at the end of each year. It would also be

convenient for her to worship at the monastery, since only two kilometers of mountain road separated the monastery from their new home. She was sure that living so near the monastery where her ancestors had worshiped piously for generations would protect her family.

Xjirimu and Dalaxja determined to compensate their creditors with their home and remaining livestock. The two went to the village temple, offered a sheep to the village temple *pram*, lit incense, prostrated, vowed that their whole family would believe in them forever, and beseeched the *pram* to protect their family once they arrived and began a new life.

The *pram's* medium gave Dalaxja a piece of sacred cloth from the sedan and communicated, "Take it to your new home and beseech me when you have trouble."



## EATEN BY WOLVES

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The whole family – Xjirimu, her husband, her son, and three daughters – left their home and walked east with their large cooking pot, wood bowls, and clothes on the propitious<sup>11</sup> first morning of the fifth lunar month. Xjirimu carried her five year old daughter on her back. Dalaxja led the other two daughters and their son towards Rgulang Monastery. Toward sunset they reached today's Langja Village, Wushi Town and were allowed to spend the night in a local Mongghul home. The next day they reached Rgulang Monastery and visited Xjirimu's uncle's home, where they stayed, waiting for the monastery to make an arrangement.

On the third day after their arrival, the carpenter-uncle led Xjirimu and her husband to a monastery official who said, "We're happy you have come to work the monastery's land. We will supply you with basic farming tools and other things you need. Please work hard, give grain and straw to the monastery at the end of each year, herd the monastery's sheep, and comply with all monastery rules."

Xjirimu and her husband sincerely agreed and, the following day, her uncle and the monastery official led them over a steep mountain to the area where Xjirimu's descendants continue to live in today's Yomajaa Natural Village, Qanzua Administrative Village, Wushi Town. Xjirimu never returned to Yomajaa Village in today's Donggou Township.

The area was a vast, beautiful primeval forest where pine, birch, and cypress grew. Only a single village was located at the foot of the mountain a few kilometers away. The forest belonged to Rgulang Monastery, not to any single

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<sup>11</sup> The first, eighth, and fifteenth days of each lunar month are considered propitious.

Living Buddha. Once they arrived, the monastery official advised they be particularly mindful of wild animals and left.

Xjirimu and her husband quickly erected a log cabin in a narrow valley, plowed virgin land, and began a new life. A year later, the log building had been replaced by four sturdy rooms built by the carpenter-uncle, and enclosed by walls, which made them feel safer.

The soil was fertile. Xjirimu's farming expertise and her family's hard work brought harvests that filled their stomachs, fed the livestock, and paid taxes to Rgulang Monastery. But there was also a dark side. Wolves nonchalantly strolled down from the mountains in broad daylight, came near their home, and attacked their calves and sheep. Every monk had one to five dogs. Some scavenged for food around their home. Tughuan Living Buddha had more than fifty dogs – there were more dogs than people at Rgulang Monastery. They were fed little, searched everywhere, and sometimes attacked livestock.

Xjirimu and her husband understood these dangers and burned incense and prostrated to their *pram*, Rgulang Monastery, and Great Heaven every morning. They also lit a lamp in the shrine room every night. Their solitary home stood halfway up a mountain surrounded by trees. It was deadly silent at night, except for the wolves howling. Calves and lambs were cowed and stood silently in mute terror. Xjirimu worried that a wolf might leap into their home at any moment.

Dalaxja slept poorly one night, getting up repeatedly and checking the livestock to ensure they were safe. An icy wind roared viciously down the darkness of the mountain. Dalaxja guessed wolves would invade the compound, because heavy snow had made it hard for them to find prey. Suddenly a heavy thump sounded on the roof. He got up, lit a lamp, and said to his suddenly awakened wife and children, "Don't worry. I'll see what it is." When he slowly half-opened the door, a hungry wolf glared ferociously at him from the stable door.

Dalaxja bellowed, "Get out! I'll shoot you!" and aimed his rifle at the wolf. The wolf leapt to the stable roof



and cast a glance at Dalaxja before lazily springing from the stable roof without a trace of fear.

Dalaxja returned to bed but did not try to sleep. Instead, he smoked strong smelling tobacco in his pipe, one bowlful after another. He lit the pipe with tightly twisted sesame straw that men made and kept inside their sashes. They lit it with a bit of tinder and flint before starting to smoke and let it burn until it was stamped out. He thought, "What a horrible place! What an audacious wolf! Why did we come live here – a place full of wolves, dogs, and fear? My headstrong wife is responsible, insisting we move here, persuaded by her uncle."

His thoughts turned sad, and tears rolled down his face. He wiped them away with his sleeve, put down his pipe on a table next to his wife, and was little comforted by seeing his children and wife sweetly sleeping. He vowed that he had to live well for himself, his lovely children, and his wife, and then he fell asleep.

Finally, that long, frigid, fearful winter passed and by the fifth lunar month it was time to weed the fields. Xjirimu rose early and looked at the sky one morning as golden sunshine spread over the world in a cloudless sky. She said to her husband, "You and our son herd the livestock on the mountainside. I'll weed in the fields with our daughters. Today is wonderful! Enjoy herding on the mountains among the trees. Start supper if we weed late, OK? Bye!" Carrying their six month old baby on her back, she led her three daughters to the fields, humming a melodious love song. She nursed her baby, wrapped it in her coarse wool gown, covered it with a big basket, and prepared to collect weeds to feed the family's pigs later that afternoon.

The baby fell asleep with a full stomach. As Xjirimu weeded, she said to daughters, "You are all grown up. What is the most valuable thing in the world? Food, of course! It is the most important thing for us. Even if your home has several rooms full of gold, it means nothing without food. Our ancestors warned us never to waste food. Our family has seen the day when your father left to beg. Once we were too poor to visit your grandparents' home on the first day of the first lunar month."

Xjirimu felt her heart stir, and continued, "Be sure to weed between those two rows of barley. We need to weed the barley fields three different times before it's ripe."

"Wah! Wah!" wailed the baby. Xjirimu rushed in the direction of the terrified shrieks but the baby was gone. Two wolf bitches had pushed over the basket and snatched the baby by its neck. Xjirimu shouted at the wolves, rushing towards them, waving her weeding trowel. The wolves immediately flung the baby aside and fled. Seeing the baby's half eaten face and blood gushing from its neck, Xjirimu fainted.

She woke up at home, babbling incoherently. Xjirimu's carpenter-uncle and two monks came from Rgulang Monastery. One monk took a scripture volume from his yellow shoulder bag, touched it to Xjirimu's head and upper body, and then chanted scriptures while his monk companion divined the cause of Xjirimu's abnormal behavior.

"OK, everything is fine now. Don't worry. She'll be normal soon," one monk said, wiping sweat from his forehead. "You must do several things quickly. Take the baby's corpse to the mountain. Then tonight, call Xjirimu's soul back to your home from the field where it is now wandering by killing a chicken. There is still time to call it back. If you do this, her soul will surely return to her body, and she will recover."

Xjirimu's carpenter-uncle carried the tiny corpse in a basket to a mountain top behind their home and placed it on a large flat stone. Vultures swooped near the corpse, but none began feeding. Some vultures flew in a circle above the corpse, others stood near. The carpenter-uncle thought, "What's wrong? You vultures never did this before. Maybe you're too lazy to eat? Maybe you pity this baby who only spent several months in this world before having its little life ended viciously by wolves? Let me help you." Then he chopped the corpse into pieces, which the vultures frenziedly devoured in a few minutes.

Meanwhile, Dalaxja took a white chicken from the chicken roost, cut off the chicken's head, touched the head to Xjirimu's body, and said, "Please return her soul quickly."

Next, he ran to the front courtyard gate and threw the chicken through the previously opened front gate, certain his wife's wandering soul would return because it had been exchanged for the chicken's soul.

Dalaxja, his three daughters, his son, and the carpenter-uncle went to the field where Xjirimu had fainted. They stood in a line with the carpenter-uncle at the head and then walked backwards to their home with their bodies bent, saying together, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven. Are we calling Xjirimu's soul? Yes, we are calling..." They repeated this until they passed through their front gate, believing that the lost soul would return, then they barred the front gate firmly from inside. This was done for three nights.

Xjirimu improved after all the monk had instructed was completed, but she dared not leave her home, fearing more disaster would come. She despondently lay on her *bankang*,<sup>12</sup> with glassy, dull eyes.

"What should we do now? Should we still live here?" Dalaxja asked her carpenter-uncle as he snorted snuff, his wrinkled face suggesting he had greatly aged in the past few days.

"I'm not sure. It's not an ideal place. Why not return to our original village?" the carpenter-uncle replied.

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<sup>12</sup> An adobe platform divided into a *yikang* and *bankang*. An opening was made at the center of the *bankang* so that it was easier to heat by putting fuel (straw and animal dung) through the opening. Five to six planks covered the opening once the heating materials were put inside and could be removed a couple of days later. The *yikang* was built of adobe bricks and heated by an oven from outside the room. The father and the sons of the family slept on the felt-covered *yikang*, while the wife, daughters, and babies slept on the *bankang* without a bed cushion. This was because the baby's urine easily passed inside the *bankang* and their excrement could easily be scraped inside. Sleeping on a *bankang* is uncomfortable because there is no cushion beneath the body, and it emits smoke. Babies occasionally fell into the *bankang* through the uneven planks and were seriously burned.

"Xjirimu would disagree. She swore to our *pram* she would never return," Dalaxja said despondently.

"We must find a way to make a safe life. Rgulang Monastery will allow more households to settle here. Other families in our home village asked about your situation during my last visit. Some want to come here. They complain of the many people and little farming land where they live now. They would be happy here, because it is very near our holy Rgulang Monastery, and it is monastery land," the carpenter-uncle said hopefully.

"Yes, it's a wonderful idea, but it depends on you. If more families come, we won't worry about wolves and dogs," Dalaxja said, happiness spreading across his face.



## LEARNING EMBROIDERY

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Finally, thanks to the carpenter-uncle's skillful negotiation between Rgulang Monastery and his natal village, eight additional families moved near Xjirimu's new home. They were on intimate terms and helped each other. More families arrived as the years passed. Eventually, the village was home to families with various surnames.<sup>13</sup> The taboo against marriage between people of the same surname was thus easily avoided. Villagers interacted as though they were from the same clan, despite their different surnames, because they had come from the same general area.

The new community gained strength as more people arrived, herded livestock, and farmed together. In time, they no longer worried about wolf attacks. Every family

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<sup>13</sup> Dalaxja was surnamed 'Wang'. We do not know how he came to have this surname. The first author's surname 'Li' is probably derived from Li Tusi (native chief). Similarly Jugui's surname 'Lu' is probably derived from Lu Tusi.

The *tusi* (native chief) system was abrogated in Monguor areas in 1931. Lu Tusi was a Mongghul hereditary *tusi* governing today's Yongdeng County, parts of Tianzhu and Yongjing counties in Gansu Province, and parts of Minhe and Ledu counties in Qinghai Province.

A family in Szanghuali Village, Donggou Township received their surname (Fu) from an official work team that visited the village during the Land Reform Movement in 1952. The team asked the family what they were called in Mongghul. When they were told Bayan Kun 'Rich Man', they were designated the Fu 'rich' family. Similarly, a family in Shgeayili Village, Donggou Township got their surname, Niu 'cattle', when an official work team came to the village and saw a man from the family herding cattle.

cultivated as much land as they needed. They had sufficient fuel to cook and heat their sleeping platforms and had ample grassland for their livestock on the mountain slopes and valleys. They were content.

Xjirimu's family ate together every night and afterwards, sat around the sheep-dung-fueled fire at the center of the *pei*, drank tea, and listened to Dalaxja tell Mongghul folktales under a dancing, dim, rape-oil light. Interest in his stories was intense enough to dispel tiredness and sleepiness. Dalaxja sipped liquor as he spun his stories. After drinking for a while he sang Mongghul songs. He took out his bag of aromatic tobacco tied through his sash, filled his pipe, and smoked. His children listened in rapt attention.

Xjirimu assembled her daughters one day and said, "It's time you learned to embroider. It's the most important thing to learn before you marry. Only if you embroider well will you gain the respect of others and have your mother-in-law, husband, and your husband's sisters treat you well when you move into their home. I will give you thread. Ask me if you have problems in sewing."

Xjirimu was strict with the embroidery. She scolded and even beat the girls if they embroidered poorly. When they had time, they sat on the *pei* and sewed, or went outside and sat in the lanes where village girls sat together sewing and learning embroidery skills from each other. Xjirimu's daughters had four important tasks to master, as did all Mongghul girls: embroidery; learning folksongs, particularly wedding songs and funeral lamentations; fieldwork; and housework. They worked hard in the fields and embroidered under smoky rape-oil lamps after supper and on snowy and rainy days.

## SLEEPY DALAXJA

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**X**jirimu's husband, Dalaxja, was known by the nickname 'Sleepy' in his natal area of Haliqi<sup>14</sup> and in his new home in Fulaan Nara, because he was prone to falling asleep at any time. He once invited villagers to his home to chant scriptures on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month in compliance with the custom that a household chant early each lunar month to maintain their security.

Villagers came to Dalaxja's home, sat on the heated *pei*, and were served tea and bread, as Xjirimu and her daughters busily boiled pork and steamed meat and potato-stuffed buns. As the villagers chanted, a boiling teapot overflowed and splattered into the fire. The villagers were intently chanting scriptures with their eyes closed. Several seconds passed and no one had noticed the overflowing kettle.

"Where is Dalaxja?" an old man finally asked.

"He was just here serving tea," another man responded in surprise.

"He is here, sleeping on the floor," observed a young man sitting on the front edge of the *pei*, pointing at Dalaxja, who was snoring with his back against the big wheat-flour-

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<sup>14</sup> Mongghul in the Huzhu area were historically divided into Fulaan Nara (Red Sun) and Haliqi (meaning unknown). Haliqi includes the present Danma, Donggou, Wei yuan, Taizi, and Dongshan townships. Fulaan Nara refers to Wushi, Songduo, and Hongyazigou townships (in Huzhu County) and Shdara Township (in Ledu County). Fulaan Nara is located northeast of the Dongyuan Mountains. Haliqi is southwest of the same mountains. Fulaan Nara residents refer to themselves as 'Karilang', while people in Haliqi refer to themselves as 'Mongghul'.

filled chest, as a cat ate the meat he held in his hand. He was so deeply asleep that shouting in his ears and pulling his arms did not rouse him.

When Xjirimu entered the room, the visitors asked, "What's wrong with him? Did he not sleep well last night?"

"Oh, no... no... he's fine. He slept well last night. This is common. We asked a high-ranking Living Buddha in Rgulang Monastery and he said it's not a problem. Eat well and drink well. Ignore him. He'll wake up by himself a bit later," Xjirimu explained with a big smile.

Dalaxja woke up, stood, and continued serving guests a short time later, as though nothing had happened. This is how Dalaxja's son, Sixty-nine, gained the nickname 'Sleepy's Son'.





## FOX HUNTING

One morning Dalaxja got up as usual. It had snowed. He rushed into the room where his son was sleeping and said, "Dear son, get up quickly. We'll go hunt fox. I want to make a beautiful fox-fur hat for you. Fox fur is beautiful and of high quality in winter." Dalaxja became animated when he talked about hunting fox. He was renowned for his skill in catching foxes. He had made fox-fur hats for his sisters and a few relatives.

As Dalaxja and his son walked out the front gate carrying baskets of wheat straw on their backs, Xjirimu said, "Be careful, Dalaxja! Take good care of my son!" She knew fox hunting was dangerous, because they hunted in deep ravines and slipping and falling on ice and snow was easy. "*O manii banii huang...*" she murmured, endlessly repeating the Six Sacred Syllables for her son and husband. Sixty-nine was her only living son.

"Father, how is it possible to catch a fox?" Sixty-nine asked.

"Follow the fox's trail to its hole. Foxes are very clever. They come out of their holes to look for food at night and re-enter their holes before dawn. They live in dens dug a long way into the earth. Each den has two or three openings. Once you know a fox has entered a hole, walk around, find the openings, and then block them all except one. That's most of the work. Finally, burn straw at the opening so smoke enters the hole. The fox will then try to escape through the blocked up openings and die from suffocation and the smoke," Dalaxja answered.

"Father, why do people wear fox-fur hats?" Sixty-nine asked, holding his father's right hand.

"Fox-fur hats are the most beautiful in the world. Our ancestors proudly wore them for their warmth and beauty.

These hats and colorful Mongghul clothes add vivid force to this bare, lifeless land in winter. What a scene to see a Mongghul lady wearing colorful clothes walking down a road through this winter land! It is just like a peony growing vigorously and seducing people who come to see it and enjoy it," Dalaxja explained.

"Now let's follow this fox trail. It must be going to Xralijin Ravine," Dalaxja said, concentrating on tracking.

Finally, as he had predicted, the fox had gone into a hole near Xralijin Ravine. Dalaxja found two openings. They blocked up one with clods, lit the straw they had brought, and fanned the smoke into the unblocked opening. A few minutes later, the fox still had not come near the opening. Dalaxja said, "Watch here. I'll go to the blocked opening to make sure it hasn't escaped." Just as he stepped away, a fox leapt from the opening and raced away. Sixty-nine was so frightened that he jumped back, slipped, and fell.

Dalaxja turned back and helped him stand and saw Sixty-nine's right ankle was bleeding and swelling. He took some cotton from his pocket, burned it, and put ash on the wound. The bleeding immediately stopped. Dalaxja put Sixty-nine on his back and headed home.

Xjirimu stood on a platform in front of their gate, anxiously waiting for their return late that afternoon. When she saw her son on Dalaxja's back, she rushed to them, and then calmed herself when she found Sixty-nine's injury was minor. They put Sixty-nine on the *pei*, where he leaned against his father's folded lambskin robe. Xjirimu stoked the horse dung fueled fire and added straw.

"You are still a child and can't do what adults do. You're lucky this time. Be careful my dear son, you are the only one who can make our family's chimney waft smoke in the future. Your three sisters are less important than you. They'll marry and leave home once they reach marriageable age," Xjirimu said, handing him a bowl of steaming mutton broth.

Dalaxja fell asleep as Xjirimu talked to Sixty-nine, his head on a small rectangular table. Xjirimu gently removed the lit pipe from his hand to avoid his robe being burned.

"I don't understand why your father is so concerned about you. You are no longer a child. It's time you learnt Mongghul folksongs and wedding and funeral orations. You went hunting fox with your father, because this is what a man should do. A mother's duty is to teach her daughters to embroider and cook. A father's teaches his sons folksongs and how to make eloquent speeches at weddings and other Mongghul gatherings," Xjirimu said, adding more broth to her son's bowl.

"Your grandfather was an outstanding singer in our old home place. He was a matchmaker countless times in many villages. He was so important that it seemed no one could have a marriage without him, because of his humor, eloquence, good looks, and his vast knowledge of folksongs. He rarely returned home from his matchmaker activities for weeks during Spring Festival. Your father learned some from him, but it was far less than what your grandfather knew. Now, I've got to go to the sheep pen to see if our ewe has given birth," Xjirimu concluded and left the room.

After supper, Xjirimu asked everyone to go to bed early because she knew Dalaxja and Sixty-nine were exhausted. Xjirimu took fire from the *pei* and put it into the *tugun*<sup>15</sup> at the courtyard center. She briefly swept the *pei*. Putting the small table aside, she spread folded pieces of felt across it. Two people shared a sheepskin as a cover. Their own clothes were their pillows.

Snow fell through the *tenchang*<sup>16</sup> and covered their sheepskin robes at night. The family huddled under their covers cozily and silently as if the snarling, frigid wind outside was unrelated to their life.

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<sup>15</sup> Mongghul households have a pit at the courtyard center where livestock dung, human urine, and ash are placed. Children defecate here. Adults urinate here only at night. The courtyard is swept and the dust is put in the pit. When it is full, it is dug out and used as manure.

<sup>16</sup> A large square hole in the ceiling that serves as a vent for smoke and allows sunlight to enter the heated *pei* room where family members sit and sleep.

## BUTCHERING HOGS

Time passed and it was the end of the year. Children waited anxiously for the New Year's period.

"What shall we do about the *nenzhu*?<sup>17</sup> It doesn't eat much, though we offer it peas every night," Xjirimu said, scooping manure from the pigsty into the basket on her back. She was accustomed to getting up early each morning and collecting manure from the livestock.

"Maybe it senses its life will soon end. We'll kill it in several days," Dalaxja replied from where he sat on the door threshold, smoking.

Sixty-nine overheard, rushed into the kitchen where his sisters were cooking breakfast, and exclaimed, "Oh! Great! We'll kill our *nenzhu* soon. The pig bladder will be mine this year. I'll kick it."

"Oh, no! It's not yours this time. You got it last year. It's mine this year. We have an agreement, right?" Xjirimu's

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<sup>17</sup> During the last month of each year, Mongghul households butcher a fattened pig, the *nenzhu*, to cook and eat in celebration of the coming New Year. Clan members and certain villagers are invited to the home for a meal after the pork is cooked. Guests are offered sausages, organs, and a portion of fat from the neck. The butchers are also treated with bone-muscle meat, which is considered better than fatty pork. The feet and head meat are served on New Year's Eve and on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month. Remaining pork is put in wheat flour in a box or hung to dry in the storeroom, and is eaten throughout the following year. Well-off families kill two pigs and one or two sheep for the New Year. Many families feed a pig for sixteen to twenty-four months. Families compete to see whose pig is the biggest and fattest.

youngest daughter, Sanjii, said angrily, addressing her two elder sisters, hoping for support.

"Yes, it should be yours, but it's hard, because he is in our parents' heart. Good things always belong to him. This is a rule in our home, right?" one elder sister replied, gazing at her hopelessly.

"No, it's mine this time! I'll get it the day the pig is slaughtered," Sanjii said.

Sixty-nine and Sanjii then began fighting and Sixty-nine wailed loudly so his parents would come help. Xjirimu calmed them down, but the conflict continued under the robe on the *pei* that night.

The day the pig was slaughtered was full of excitement for the children, who came to collect pig bristles to sell to peddlers that came to their village during pig slaughtering time. Boys exchanged bristles for firecrackers, while girls were eager to get needles and thread. The bladder was a great toy. The bladder owner arrogantly exercised his right to allow others to play with it. If he was unhappy with someone, he refused to let them play with it.

After a few days of dispute, Sixty-nine became the bladder owner, however, Sanjii could play with it for half a day and all the bristles went to the two elder sisters. In addition, Sixty-nine promised that his sisters could have the pig's *yiizi*<sup>18</sup> the day it was butchered.

Village children came to Sixty-nine's home and waited for bristles and *yiizi* the morning their pig was to be slaughtered. Dalaxja asked four young men to come help the family slaughter and butcher the pig. Once a huge pot of water was boiling, they thrust a long knife into the pig's heart from a point on the neck. Bright blood spurted into a basin, later to be used to make sausage. Once blood stopped oozing from the stab wound, a wood peg was put in the wound to

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<sup>18</sup> Pig's pancreas and the large fatty tissue covering the stomach and intestines (caul) are removed once the abdominal cavity is opened and given to children who wrap it in paper and bury it in smoldering ash under the *pei*. Half an hour later, it is divided among the children. It is considered a great delicacy.

prevent more blood from leaking out. Children began jerking out bristles from the pig's back once it stopped moving.

A pile of straw much bigger than the pig was heaped near the pigsty in the courtyard before the pig was killed. An open place was made in the center of the straw and then the pile was set ablaze. The pig carcass was put atop the blazing pile, and hot water was immediately poured on top. The steam produced by the fire and water softened the pig's skin and facilitated removing the bristles.

After the pig was slaughtered, Sixty-nine took the *yiizi*, baked it, and divided it between his sisters as he had promised. He and his friends were given the bladder and kneaded it on the ground with soil until it was soft and elastic enough to blow into a ball. Sixty-nine and other children played with it joyfully on the threshing ground in the frigid weather. They tossed it about, tried to grab it, threw it back and forth to each other, and played other games with it before it broke a few days later.

Sixty-nine felt uncomfortable the day after the pig was killed. He lay on the *pei* and periodically went to defecate in the pigsty.<sup>19</sup> His arms and legs were painful and weak. Xjirimu understood. He had been sick in the same way and at the same time before from playing too much with the bladder and eating too much pork. Pig killing happened only once a year and many children had the same malady.

The carpenter-uncle was also invited by the family to come eat pork that day. When he found Sixty-nine was sick, he asked sympathetically, "What's wrong, my dear nephew? Don't worry, you'll be fine soon. When you're well, I'll invite you to come see the monastery, OK?" He took out a piece of crystal sugar from his robe pouch as he was talking, put it in Sixty-nine's mouth, and said, "This is from Inner Mongolia. A Living Buddha from our monastery went there and gave it to me, because I built his house."

When Sanjii saw Sixty-nine take the sugar, she rushed to Sixty-nine and tried to put her tongue in his mouth.

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<sup>19</sup> People traditionally defecated in the pigsty, located inside the courtyard.

Sixty-nine quickly clamped his mouth shut and she got nothing.



## RNQAXJI MARRIES AND STAYS AT HOME

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The years passed and Xjirimu's oldest daughter, Rnqaxji, reached marriageable age. Matchmakers came to her home with gifts of homemade liquor and bread, Rnqaxji refused them all. Xjirimu angrily asked Rnqaxji, "What's wrong with you? It's natural for a woman to marry and leave her parents' home. Marriage is the first really important thing in your life. Why do you reject everyone?"

"Mother, I do think about marriage, but I don't want to leave you, Father, Younger Brother, and my two younger sisters. I'm the oldest child and I must help you. Your hard work is a burden. I don't care what others say about me if I don't marry. I know I should marry and leave, because there is a son in our home. Anyway I don't care!" she said and started wailing.

Finally, Xjirimu and her husband helplessly agreed to Rnqaxji's decision. Dalaxja told the family *pram*<sup>20</sup> about their daughter's decision and asked for a propitious day to perform the *tulighui juuligha*<sup>21</sup> ritual, after which Rnqaxji would be regarded as an adult woman, and could entertain men and bear children.

Xjirimu and her family decided to hold the ritual on the night of the fifteenth day of the twelfth lunar month.

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<sup>20</sup> Dalaxja was a medium for his village *pram*. He frequently used the sacred cloth that the *pram* had given him to help families in his new home area by treating illness, protecting livestock and crops, and so on. Sixty-nine also later became a medium.

<sup>21</sup> Literally, 'head put on'. A ritual for a woman who remains in her parents' home but who has lovers and bears children. Her children are unknown to and unacknowledged by their fathers. They bear the mother's family clan name and are considered members of the clan.



Dalaxja lit a sacrificial fire and offered incense on the roof of the home. He prostrated three times to the clan *pram*, and prayed that his daughter would have a happy life and care for him and other family members. Rnqaxji sat on the *pei* and did no housework that day. She was soon to have the new identity of an adult woman, assume the life of a married woman, have 'husbands' who would visit her secretly at night, bear children, and become a mother.

Rnqaxji was both confused and happy. She thought, "Some will say I'm insane or have physical problems because I don't marry, particularly because I have a brother. Nevertheless, my decision is correct. At least I won't be mistreated by a mother-in-law, her daughters, and even a husband, as happens in most families."

"Rnqaxji, have supper," Xjirimu said, bringing a tray of pork and steamed buns. Rnqaxji gazed at her mother, tears streaming down her cheeks. She half leaned against her mother's bosom.

"Don't feel sad! What you have chosen is great! I approve! Many Mongghul girls want to stay at home and not leave their parents. You will now be with your mother forever," Xjirimu said, wiping away her daughter's tears with her robe-sleeve as a smile grew on Rnqaxji's face.

Xjirimu's other two daughters swept the rooms and courtyard clean. Sixty-nine fed the livestock more than usual. The family did not sleep that night. Dalaxja and Xjirimu turned their prayer wheels endlessly on the *pei* while Sixty-nine sat with them and intermittently went out to put straw in a trough for the livestock. Rnqaxji and her two sisters sat on the *bankang* and quietly chatted.

At dawn, Dalaxja lit a sacrifice fire, offered incense, and prostrated to the *pram* on the house roof. Xjirimu washed and combed Rnqaxji's hair and then braided two strands into the style of a married woman. Next, she helped Rnqaxji put on new clothes and a hat. Xjirimu and her two other daughters led Rnqaxji into the kitchen where Xjirimu lit a lamp in front of the Kitchen Goddess and said, "Oh, Kitchen Goddess, my daughter, Rnqaxji, is of marriageable age. We now perform *tulighui juuligha*. We hope her future will be bright and happy."

Rnqaxji, Xjirimu, and the two other daughters prostrated three times before the Kitchen Goddess, left the kitchen, stood in front of the main room door, and prostrated three times to Great Heaven, the *pram*, and all the spirits. Rnqaxji's marriage was thus concluded. Her immediate family members had simply and easily done what was important.

Rnqaxji felt shy and did not go outside that day. The next day, when she went to fetch water in buckets attached to a pole on her shoulder, she found villagers gazing at her differently, whispering to each other, and giggling quietly. Young men were particularly excited when they learned Rnqaxji had performed *tulighui juuligha*.

Some young men tossed soil clods on Rnqaxji's roof that night. Others knocked on the front gate, all because of her marriage. The men now felt they had the right to take her, regardless of her willingness.

## DRUNK IN THE PIGSTY

It was the last day of the year. Rnqaxji's marriage had occurred a half-month earlier. Families were busy doing housework in preparation for the New Year.

Sixty-nine swept all the rooms, helped his father burn incense on the house roof, lit lamps in front of the *pram* room and on the top of the front gate, and pasted papers inscribed with sacred horses on all the doors, roofs, and courtyard walls. Xjirimu and Rnqaxji steamed twenty-four small buns and offered them to the deities. Dalaxja removed three small red-hot stones from the kitchen stove, put them in a wood bucket, added cypress needles, called everybody, and then all family members purified their faces with the water and vapor. Next, Dalaxja ran through each room in the compound, purifying the family members and animals before tossing the stones out through the open front gate.

"Son, do you understand what needs to be done before the New Year? I want you to know every step that is important to Mongghul life. Misfortune will come to all our family members if you make a mistake in this series of important rites. I'm getting old. Please do all of these things by yourself next year and ensure nothing unpleasant happens during the first half of the first lunar month. This is very important for our well-being in the coming year," Dalaxja lectured as Durijixji brought in boiled pork.

The family sat cross-legged in a circle around a straw fire sipping salted, black-brick tea on the *pei*. They ate pork, potatoes, and meat-stuffed buns. "No one should sleep tonight. If somebody does, a ghost will come and weigh them. If someone is overweight, their ears will be taken while they sleep," Xjirimu said.

"Why?" Xjirimu's youngest daughter asked.

"Maybe Heaven wishes us to eat and fully enjoy ourselves. I never saw my elders sleep on this night. We

must keep all our lamps burning until they go out by themselves," Xjirimu replied.

"Rnqaxji, heat a pot of liquor," Dalaxja said looking at the kitchen where Rnqaxji was helping herself to pork.

"No... no, don't start now. You will hold the rite to welcome the *pram* who will return soon,"<sup>22</sup> Xjirimu reminded Dalaxja.

"Oh! That's very important. Just look at how forgetful I am! I would have forgotten this completely if you hadn't reminded me," Dalaxja said smiling. Dalaxja and Sixty-nine lit a pile of straw in the courtyard center and added incense<sup>23</sup> to the fire, then lit a few firecrackers and tossed them into the air where they exploded, sending echoes everywhere. The family warmly welcomed *pram* returning from several days in Heaven to renew their service to humans.

"Fine, now everything has been done and it's time to enjoy ourselves. Pass me the liquor pot," Dalaxja said from the *pei* after he finished the *pram* reception ritual.

"Sixty-nine, please drink, too," Dalaxja said to his son.

"No! Father! I'm too young, I've never drunk liquor before," Sixty-nine said.

"Oh, it doesn't matter! You're an adult now and all Mongghul men drink," Dalaxja urged.

Sixty-nine decided his father would be unhappy if he continued to refuse so he began drinking. Sixty-nine drank a great deal with his father that night.

Nothing unpleasant happened during New Year in the home or in the village. If such things had occurred, it signified unpleasant events would occur throughout the entire year.

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<sup>22</sup> All *pram* visit Heaven on the twenty-third or twenty-fourth nights of the twelfth month. They do no service for people during the time they are gone and return to earth on New Year's Eve.

<sup>23</sup> A white flower that grows on hills. It is collected, dried, and used as incense.

Early the next morning, villagers visited each other's homes with gifts of bread, earthenware jugs of tea, and jugs of liquor. Everyone wore attractive new clothes.

"Where is Brother Sixty-nine?" one of his young friends asked.

"We don't know. He's been drinking with his father," Rnqaxji answered. Later, Sixty-nine was found lying unconscious in the pigsty, having vomited all that he had eaten and drunk.

## SIXTY-NINE LEARNS FOLKSONGS

**B**eginning in the year Sixty-nine was first drunk, Dalaxja told him to represent the family outside the home at weddings, funerals, and other rituals. Sixty-nine thus realized the importance of having a large stock of folksongs and orations and knowledge of ritual procedures. Only then could he be a real man in Mongghul society, be qualified to appear in public, and later teach younger men.

One night Sixty-nine said, "Mother, please prepare a bottle of liquor, a *kadog*,<sup>24</sup> two baked loaves of bread, and a tea brick for me. I will visit a famous folksong teacher tomorrow."

"Who?" Xjirimu asked in surprise.

"Rgulang Xoshidosirang," Sixty-nine replied.

"I know him. He's an outstanding singer. I heard him in my village when a girl from his village married and moved into our village. He came as a bridal escort and sang beautifully. Nearly all the villagers came to the wedding to hear him that day. How did you succeed in becoming his student? Many young people struggle for such a chance," Xjirimu said.

"My friend studies with him and helped me. Xoshidosirang also knows Father supports me," Sixty-nine happily replied.

Xjirimu sleeplessly tossed in bed that night, happily imagining her son's admirable intention and hoped he would equal his grandfather in terms of cultural knowledge. She got up very early the next morning and baked bread.

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<sup>24</sup> Strips of silk (white, blue, orange, or yellow) offered as tokens of respect.

About two hours later Sixty-nine mounted his horse carrying his gift-stuffed *dalen*,<sup>25</sup> said goodbye to his parents as they saw him off in front of their courtyard gate, and soon reached Xoshidosirang's home. He was escorted into the home, while his horse was put in a stable. Sixty-nine placed his gifts on a chest in the center of the main room. Xoshidosirang was busily singing and explaining each song word to his three students on the *pei*. Sixty-nine greeted Xoshidosirang, his family members, and students, one by one facing the *pei*. Next, he prostrated three times to Xoshidosirang and was then invited to sit on the *pei* and offered tea and bread.

"Dear boy, why are you interested in learning songs? You know they are hard to learn. Many give up halfway," Xoshidosirang said.

"I want to sing at weddings and other rituals," Sixty-nine said.

"And then?" Xoshidosirang asked.

"I don't know how to say more than what I just said," Sixty-nine said, not daring to mention his dream of being famous.

"Learning folksongs is not just to sing. It is also important that you learn Mongghul history and culture through songs. Many singers cannot explain them well. Our people use no written language and our ancestors could not record our culture over the countless years of our history. How sad! Many of our songs are also sung in Tibetan. These are hard to learn, because we cannot speak Tibetan. The songs sung in Mongghul are easier for us to understand and reflect our history. For example, 'Tangdarihgiima' is sung whenever people drink together. It reminds us of how our ancestors lived.

"*Szii*<sup>26</sup> is sung in Tibetan and explains how to make divinations. *Qarog*<sup>27</sup> is also sung in Tibetan, too. Both are wonderful songs full of profound philosophical knowledge.

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<sup>25</sup> A long narrow wool bag, slung over a person's shoulder or across the back of a pack animal.

<sup>26</sup> Do a divination.

<sup>27</sup> Formation of the Earth.

*Huni*<sup>28</sup> is a traditional Mongghul folksong sung in Tibetan describing Shba, the Mongghul leader who was imprisoned. While in jail he felt lonely and sad and created this song about Mongghul history based on his personal experience," Xoshidosirang said, his face solemn, tears sparkling in his eyes.

This unforgettable lesson impressed Sixty-nine with the value of folksongs and why people learned them.

Xoshidosirang suggested Sixty-nine first study Tibetan because many Mongghul songs were sung in Tibetan. He suggested he study at Rgulang Monastery where certain monks knew Tibetan well and then return to learn folksongs once his Tibetan was sufficient to understand the songs.

The carpenter-uncle had a monk friend, Cichin, who was a Mongol. His parents had piously offered him to the service of Tughuan Living Buddha when he and his entourage passed through their home place in Inner Mongolia when Cichin had been ten years old. Thousands of pious Mongol herdsmen came to see the renowned Tughuan Living Buddha and offered *kadog*, tea, and felt. Rich herdsmen offered sheep, cattle, mules, horses, and camels. The old couple approached Tughuan and said, "Dear Lord, we are so blessed to see you. We have only our son to give you. Please take him to your monastery." The couple's piety deeply touched Tughuan Living Buddha. When he returned to his monastery he summoned the boy and gave him the religious name, Cichin, and sent him to study in Larang Monastery.<sup>29</sup> Cichin finished his studies fifteen years later, and asked to return to Rgulang Monastery to teach young monks.

Cichin was highly knowledgeable in oral and written Tibetan. Of the several hundred mostly Mongghul monks in the monastery, few could speak Tibetan well. They used

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<sup>28</sup> *Huni* (sheep) is a traditional Mongghul folksong, historically written in Tibetan, because Mongghul used no written system.

<sup>29</sup> Larang Monastery is located in today's Xiahe County, Gannan Tibetan Prefecture, Gansu Province.



Mongghul in their daily lives, and only used Tibetan when reciting scriptures.

Cichin promised to teach Sixty-nine Tibetan at his home, because the carpenter-uncle was his best friend. Sixty-nine happily returned home and reported what had transpired in much detail, which enthralled his parents.

"Excellent! Son, what you've already accomplished and your future plan are great. We're sure you will succeed in learning Tibetan. No one in our former village ever learned Tibetan. Everyone there and all our relatives are illiterate. A few wealthy Mongghul send their sons to Han villages to study Chinese at private teachers' homes, and several families have collectively invited a Chinese teacher to their homes. Literacy is essential in making business agreements; traveling to Ghuaisang<sup>30</sup> and Rjanog,<sup>31</sup> as some Mongghul have done; recording family crop production data; and so on. You can do many helpful things in the village and for our relatives after you learn Tibetan," Xjirimu said.

"Mother, you are getting old, and I worry about..." Sixty-nine started.

"I know what you mean. Don't worry. We're still strong enough to work in the fields. If I rest for a few days my joints start to hurt. I like working. We were born farmers and we must work. Your sisters are also old enough to do adult work," Dalaxja said.

Sixty-nine studied Tibetan at Cichin's home, where they ate together. Sixty-nine learned Tibetan, Buddhism, about the founding of Rgulang Monastery, the specific official positions of the many living Buddhas, when and how two Mongghul monks went to Russia during the early Qing Dynasty, the relationship between Duluun Lunkuang<sup>32</sup> and

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<sup>30</sup> Tibet.

<sup>31</sup> Beijing.

<sup>32</sup> 'Duluun Lunkuang' (literally: 'seven valleys' or 'seven jurisdictions') refers to the territory administered by Rgulang Monastery before 1949. Residents within the territory are thought to be all Mongghul. The seven valleys are Danma, Wushi, Donggou, Dongshan, Weiyuan, and Dala (located in

Rgulang Monastery, what a boundless territory Amdo<sup>33</sup> was, why people needed to be compassionate, the difficulty in obtaining a better next incarnation, and so on.

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today's Ledu County) and Dongxia Township (located in Datong Hui and Mongghul Autonomous County).

<sup>33</sup> Amdo refers to northern and central Tibetan areas (portions of the present Qinghai, Gansu, and Sichuan provinces) and also denotes an important Tibetan dialect.

## DURIJIXJI'S UNHAPPY WEDDING

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**X**jirimu's home brimmed with people one cold winter day. Some lay on straw piles on house roofs enjoying the weak sunshine; others clustered around smoldering fires in the courtyard sipping liquor, singing drinking songs, and playing finger games.<sup>34</sup> Others sat on the *pei* discussing issues of import. Young women kicked a shuttlecock on the threshing ground, displaying their colorful, peacock-like clothes. Several young men stood, smoking on a manure pile, observing the women on the threshing ground. Mobs of children ran here and there, shouting and chasing each other.

Stern-faced, Xjirimu stood in the courtyard alone, her arms crossed, her hands in her sleeves. A day later, Xjirimu's second daughter, Durijixji, would marry and move a few kilometers away into a new home in Qanzua Village. People from the local village had come to join the banquet before Durijixji departed for the groom's home.

Xjirimu wondered, "What's wrong with me today? I should be happy. Why can't I get rid of my clouded heart? Have the bride-taker and matchmakers forgotten something?"

"Come everybody! Come eat!" a man shouted, from the courtyard center, his hands around his mouth creating a megaphone. Children rushed through the front gate and tried to be the first to get good seats in the courtyard. They sat on straw,<sup>35</sup> took out their bowls, and held them up whenever

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<sup>34</sup> A drinking game in which two players point fingers at each other and shout a number. Each combination of fingers has numerical value. Losers drink as punishment.

<sup>35</sup> Guests sit on straw placed in the courtyard. During weddings and funerals, boards are placed near the straw and

someone came to fill their bowls with *nofan*.<sup>36</sup> Adults self-consciously stood along the courtyard sides waiting until the children were done. This was the last serving of food for the assembled throng.

"They're coming!" two boys shouted, rushing through the front gate. The wedding manager had arranged for the two boys to act as sentries – on lookout for the arrival of the matchmakers and the bride-taker.

A few young men quickly took the liquor-pot, went outside the front gate, and saw matchmakers and the bride-taker walking toward Xjirimu's home, leading a horse-drawn cart with wood wheels. The two matchmakers wore black lambskin hats and white sheepskin robes while the bride-taker was clad in a coarse wool gown and wore a white felt hat. Two gift-filled *dalen* and a piece of white felt were in the cart. The felt was to be used as the bride's cushion the next morning when she rode a horse to the groom's home.

The young men warmly and ceremoniously welcomed the visitors with offerings of liquor and polite greetings. Women sprinkled water on the guests as they entered through the front gate, signifying propitiousness. Once they entered the home, children tried to be the first to take their saddles, breechings, stirrups, and the piece of white felt. They then hid them in the bride's home, under the straw pile, in storehouses, in livestock stables, and so on until early the next morning when the bride-taker would ask for them in exchange for coins. Children loved earning coins this way, and it also added to the merrymaking.

The matchmakers and bride-taker were invited to sit on the *pei* and offered tea and bread.

Women from Xjirimu's side soon discovered the groom's side had cheated them. They had not brought earrings for the bride nor a mounting-horse-skirt for her to wear the next morning at the time of her departure. It was understood that these items were essential. Without them, the bride could not mount her horse at the most important time

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used as tables for bread and tea bowls. All villagers are welcome to attend such occasions.

<sup>36</sup> A soup of pork, potatoes, and potato-starch noodles.

the next morning. In order for the bride's future to be bright, Mongghul are very strict about details, and particularly so when the bride leaves her natal home for her new husband's home.

Xjirimu and others close to the family were enraged at what could only be interpreted as a deliberate insult. The matchmakers' excuse that they had forgotten to bring these articles was dismissed as a ploy. It was a profound insult to the entire village.

"It's true that Qanzua villagers denigrate us because we moved here recently and live on their land. This is why they treat us so unfairly and rudely," the banquet manager sputtered angrily.

"Qanzua villagers went to Rgulang Monastery several times, trying to prevent us from settling here, arguing that the land we live on now is theirs. Finally, powerful monks in Rgulang Monastery prevailed. That's why they act out this game now," Dalaxja said, repeating what he had learned from the carpenter-uncle.

"What they really want is to take our girl to their village and deeply insult us in the process. We shouldn't let this happen or they really will despise us and our village," the manager said.

That night, village women stood outside the window and seriously abused the guests from the groom's side in word and song. They put *soquan*<sup>37</sup> on the bride-taker's head when the bride-taker was asked to dance in the courtyard. They also gave the matchmakers and bride-taker little food. The matchmakers and bride-taker perfectly understood all of this. Their paramount task, however, was to bring the bride to the groom's home. They stoically endured the humiliation, taking solace in the revenge they planned the following day at the groom's home.

At midnight, the groom's side representatives were asked to sleep on the *pei* in a neighbor's home. Xjirimu's side did not sleep but discussed who would escort Durijixji to the

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<sup>37</sup> A ring of straw used to steam bread. It is a great insult to put a *soquan* on a man's head.

groom's home and how to respond to the attack they knew would come at the groom's home.

Before dawn, the bride-taker pleaded with the village children to return what they had hidden and promised to give coins for these items. When no one produced the white felt, he promised to give more coins because it was critical that the bride sit on it.

It quickly grew brighter. The groom's side's *pram* had indicated that the bride must set off before the sun shone on nearby mountain peaks. If the bride and her escorts did not set off at the right time, misfortune would surely befall the groom's home. The bride-taker impatiently found the banquet manager, and begged him to bring the white felt. The manager said that he really did not know where it was nor who had taken it.

The bride-taker then frantically began searching for it. Xjirimu's side had deliberately arranged this, wanting to insult the groom's side. Finally the bride-taker begged Xjirimu for help. She then told Sanjii to return the white felt for two coins. As red sunlight glinted on the mountain peaks, the bride-taker madly urged the escorts to start off.

"Can you wait? Don't you see what I am doing?" Dalaxja shouted at the bride-taker, as he waved a cypress branch tied with sheep wool behind Durijixji's horse, calling, "Durijixji, respond to me!" meaning Durijixji would not take the family's luck with her to the groom's family.

The bride-taker's heart was full of anger but he could only helplessly stand aside until Dalaxja finished his 'luck' calling.

The bride, her companion, and about twenty escorts went to the groom's village with the dowry chest on the cart. The escorts began singing when they drew near the groom's home:

The bride must be received with many horses when she dismounts.

She must be received with many yaks when she dismounts.

She must be received with many sheep when she dismounts...

The escorts were received in front of the groom's front gate with dancing and three cups of liquor each. Durijixji dismounted. Her companion and the groom supported her from either side while a woman from the groom's side held a piece of white felt in front of her and walked backward through the gate and then proceeded to the kitchen, where the bride prostrated three times to the Kitchen Goddess, and then was led to her chamber with her companion.

The groom's home was full of people. The bride's escorts were hospitably entertained in the courtyard. Everyone drank and sang as though nothing out of the ordinary had occurred at the bride's home. However, the situation deteriorated as sunset approached, signaling the time for the escorts' departure. The groom's side did their utmost to make the escorts drunk. The escorts had anticipated this. A while later more local men came into the courtyard, offered liquor in turn, forcing the escorts to drink more and deliberately pouring liquor on their clothes through the neck-openings of their sheepskin robes.

At this juncture an old escort and Sixty-nine quietly went to Durijixji's chamber and said goodbye. Durijixji and her companion immediately burst into tears. The escorts then began walking through the front gate. Men from the groom's side circled them tightly. Sixty-nine was surrounded and held by four men. He tried to escape, but his mouth was clamped open. Horse urine was poured down his throat, and he felt someone stabbing his thighs. The groom's chose Sixty-nine to severely insult, because as the bride's brother, he was the most important of the escorts. Humiliating him was taking revenge.

"Ah!" Sixty-nine shouted. Four mounted escorts on horseback came near with his horse. With their assistance he mounted and galloped down the lane leading to the village entrance, as they were pelted with stones from behind. The escorts had earlier put stones in their robe pouches and now flung stones in return. A man from the groom's side was hit on the head, fell to the ground, and began bleeding, further enraging the groom's side. Some men mounted their horses and gave chase. Halfway home, the pursuers spied many

strong young men waiting in ambush on two sides of a hill. When they charged the groom's side waving clubs, the pursuers immediately stopped, turned their horses, and galloped back toward their village, and soon were out of sight.

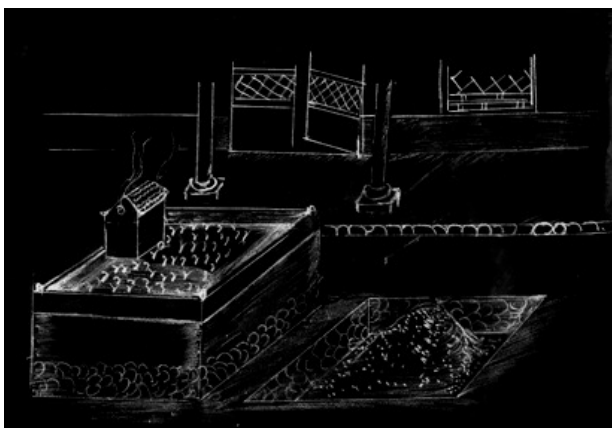
The escorts returned home to a hero's welcome. They gathered on Xjirimu's *pei* and were served hot tea and food. They verified that they had been offered horse urine when they departed the groom's home. Xjirimu asked Sixty-nine to sit by her. The odor of horse urine was strong on his clothes. She brought another robe for him and told him to change. Sixty-nine's thighs were painful, swollen, and bleeding from puncture wounds.

"Mother, we are fine, now. Will they abuse my sister?" Sixty-nine asked.

"No. She is now a member of their family, and even a village member. She is no longer a member of our family and village," Xjirimu said, calming herself. Her family members and fellow villagers had returned after successfully completing their task.

"Mother, how was it when you were my age?" Sixty-nine asked.

Xjirimu answered, "The same. Our ancestors often behaved this way and sent villagers to meet them halfway and even closer than halfway with clubs, knives, and spears so that their men would not be injured."





RNQAXJI'S WORRIES

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**A**fter obtaining the status of a married woman, Rnqaxji stayed near her mother and sisters when she went to work in the fields and whenever she left her home. She was not afraid of wild animals or bandits as she walked down the steep mountain paths, but she did fear the young men who pursued her.

After becoming a married woman, men seemed to think she was theirs for the taking. She could have as many men as she liked, or no men. She felt profoundly that she was different. Eventually, she understood that she needed men, but in a way unlike women who had husbands at home and who had held wedding rituals in both the bride and groom's homes. Their relatives, clan members, and villagers had formally escorted them to the grooms' homes.

Rnqaxji dared not publicly indicate her relationship with a man. Although she could have children without worry, she could not walk with her men in the daytime. Terrible gossip ensued if a woman like her was seen with a man in public.

Rnqaxji thought about the uncountable women who had been in her position before her time as she retired to her bedroom every night. They had many children, and from their children's faces and physical appearance, people speculated about the identity of the fathers. Most women never revealed the identity of their children's fathers. Couples commonly discussed the paternity of such children at night in their bedrooms, and young people in village lanes or near the village also gossiped about it.

Sometimes, Rnqaxji blamed herself for refusing many men who had offered themselves. Some were quite handsome and sincere. "Probably," she thought, "one is destined for me, and we will share our lives in a special way."

Xjirimu noticed her daughter's behavior and thought she worried about negatively influencing the family if she allowed men to visit. She also thought Rnqaxji might be concerned about slanderous gossip. One night Xjirimu entered Rnqaxji's chamber where Rnqaxji slept alone after the *tulighui juuligha* ritual. "Mother, why are you coming here so late?" Rnqaxji asked in surprise.

"Oh, it's just... I don't know. I can't sleep these nights. I think about many things, over and over. There seems to be no solution. What's the reason? Why?" Xjirimu asked and smiled. She lightly touched Rnqaxji's forehead with her warm fingers and sat near her.

Rnqaxji's heart warmed, she blushed, and said, "Mother, you must be thinking about your nephews and relatives in our former home. Some day I'll go with you. Or, maybe you are worried about your children?" Rnqaxji put her head on Xjirimu's lap, stretched out her arms, and encircled Xjirimu's waist.

"Yes, you are right. I often dream about our former village, my parents, and your father's parents. Their faces are so clear. I see people passing through the village temple front gate. A slender column of light blue smoke curls and twists above the temple and then joyfully vanishes into the air. I yearn to see the road our family walked along to reach our current home. But I cannot, because I vowed to our *pram* that I would never return to my old home. If I did, I would surely be hit by a lightning bolt."

"Mother, don't worry and don't say such dreadful things. My head itches," Rnqaxji said, changing the subject as she set the dim rape oil light near her mother, to help her find lice on her head.

Xjirimu said, "There are many lice on your head, because you have unsolved problems in your heart. Look! So many lice! Some are fat, bulging with your blood! You will be sucked to death if I don't kill them," and began popping the lice between her thumbnails.

"What's troubling you?" Xjirimu asked.

"Sorry, Mother. What can I do? Others will gossip about us if I... Our home will be considered a brothel if men

come visit," Rnqaxji said tightly squeezing Xjirimu's robe, her face buried in Xjirimu's lap.

"Your decision about marriage was correct. Your father and I both agreed. Think no more about your marriage. Many girls like you live in our old village. I often heard about and met women like you in the Fulaan Nara area. Behave as a married woman. Don't worry if men come here. This is normal in Mongghul life," Xjirimu said, continuing to find lice on Rnqaxji's head and popping them.

Rnqaxji started sobbing.

"Remember Daughter, *tulighui juuligha* is perfectly acceptable. Our ancestors practiced this for countless years. Do what a married woman does. Do as you like. Your father and I will always support you. This is your family and your home! Oh! The lamp is nearly burned out. I'm going to bed. Good night, Daughter. Don't forget to check for lice in your clothes tomorrow," Xjirimu said and left, shutting the door softly behind her.

Rnqaxji felt she had been resurrected, blew out the lamp, and slept soundly. Later, Rnqaxji slept with men.

## A DISAPPOINTED SUITOR

Rnqaxji, cut grass for the livestock today. I have a bellyache. Sanjii will take bread to your carpenter-uncle at the monastery. He probably has eaten all his bread. She'll bring back butter for us to make lamps for our *pram*," Xjirimu said to Rnqaxji, who was still in bed.

"OK," Rnqaxji said sleepily. She reluctantly sat up, leaned against the wall, and examined the sunshine strolling through the window. She understood it was late, otherwise her mother wouldn't urge her to get up. After washing her face, Rnqaxji put several hot boiled potatoes in her robe pouch, and quickly walked out of the home with a basket on her back and a sickle.

As she walked through the front gate, she noticed a magpie chirping in a tree in front of her home. "Hm, a magpie chattering is a good omen. Maybe guests will visit us, and then we'll have a nice meal tonight," Rnqaxji thought happily. She walked along a small path leading up a mountain behind her village, munching on her potatoes. She soon reached a slope covered with abundant grass, rolled up her long, wide sleeves, and started cutting.

"Aagu,<sup>38</sup> are you mowing?" a man called from some distance away. Rnqaxji was astonished, looked in the direction of the sound, and saw a young man squatting at the foot of a slope, gazing at her. He tried to squat lower, behind the tall grass.

"Oh! What are you doing here, Aawu?"<sup>39</sup> Rnqaxji asked. The same man, Durijinbin, had approached her before and she had politely refused. He was from Liuja Village, more than an hour's walk away. He lived with his mother.

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<sup>38</sup> Young woman.

<sup>39</sup> Elder brother.

His father had died vomiting blood when Durijinbin was a very young child. He was a dutiful son and past marriageable age. His family had sent matchmakers to several girls' homes to propose marriage, but they were rebuffed on the grounds that his family was too impoverished.

"I just came to see you," Durijinbin stammered.

"Why? I'm not special," Rnqaxji answered shyly, lowering her head.

"You are very special to me. I saw your hair was disheveled, and you were walking alone on a rainy day in a dream last night. I thought you might have met something unpleasant, so this morning I got up early and came directly here to see you without even eating breakfast," Durijinbin said, leaning his right shoulder and arm against the slope and plucking a yellow wildflower.

"Please leave, otherwise I'm afraid others will see us. It's not a suitable place and time to chat with you," Rnqaxji said.

"OK. May I visit you at your home tonight after the villagers sleep?" Durijinbin asked.

Rnqaxji nodded assent.

Durijinbin removed a small round baked bread bun from his pouch and offered it, "Take it. A relative visited my mother with this yesterday. Please have it," he said and, a few minutes later, was out of sight.

Rnqaxji's basket was full a few hours later. On her way home she thought, "Were the magpies chattering this morning for this guest?"

Rnqaxji's family went to bed after chatting and drinking tea on the *pei* that evening. Rnqaxji sat alone on her private *bankang* without slipping under her lambskin cover as she usually did. Her uneasy heart beat irregularly in anticipation of the impending meeting. She gazed out the window and listened for footsteps at the front gate. She had slept in a corner room close to the front gate after becoming a married woman.

An hour or so passed. She decided to go meet Durijinbin. She knew he was waiting for her. She gently opened her door and walked with feather-like steps to the front gate. She softly half-opened it, walked outside, and

immediately noticed a man squatting under an old tree, signaling to her. It was inky black, and Rnqaxji could not see well enough to recognize him.

"Follow me," she hissed.

He followed her inside and she quickly closed the gate. Once they were inside her private chamber, Rnqaxji was stunned for it was not Durijinbin, but another man she had entertained several times previously.

"It's you... I thought it must be..." Rnqaxji exclaimed in a startled whisper.

"Yes. It's me! What's wrong with me tonight? You look so surprised! What's wrong with you? Are you unhappy to see me?" he asked in surprise.

"No! I'm delighted to see you. But... anyway, everything is not what I thought," Rnqaxji replied in disappointment.

The man sensed that Rnqaxji had an engagement with another man but, filled with lust, he only wished to possess her. He embraced her tightly and pushed her down on the bed. They rolled back and forth, as though they were a long separated couple that had met after countless nights of loneliness and longing. Soon, the little room brimmed with the sounds of the two, panting and writhing on the boards of the creaking sleeping platform.

Durijinbin had arrived earlier. It was his first time to visit, and he took extraordinary care not to be seen. As he drew near the home, he noticed a man under a tree. He stopped, wondering who he was and why he was there. A short time later, a person came out and the man followed her into the courtyard. "Is Rnqaxji with another man tonight? Impossible! She promised me this morning! Probably I was cheated! Such women have affairs with whomever they please, unlike other women who have only one man. Well, I must be patient and wait for her to come meet me. I'll try to get her once the other man leaves!" Durijinbin thought.

He sat near the front gate and smoked bowl after bowl of tobacco. A few hours passed with no indication that Rnqaxji would come meet him. He decided to go inside to see what was happening, slipped through the unlatched front gate, and walked on tiptoe to the corner room. He knew it was

Rnqaxji's room, because parents made this arrangement for their daughters. He put his ear close to the window and heard the two still making love, excitedly enjoying the long night. This enraged Durijinbin, who thought, "The night should be mine, not snatched away by this man. What an insult!"

He wanted to rush into the room, beat the man, and demand that Rnqaxji explain why she had cheated him, but then calmed himself. There was no reason to interfere. What they were doing, he realized, was normal, and he had no reason to hurt them. Realizing there was no chance to be with Rnqaxji that evening, he left her home and despondently started home. He was extremely disappointed, and blamed himself for not getting Rnqaxji that night. Another man had arrived just ahead of him. He scolded himself for having such bad karma. As he walked along he loudly burst into a love song:

Cherries are good to eat, but hard to plant,  
Cherry roots ooze liquid.  
My love for you is hard to express,  
This song reveals my heartfelt thoughts.

The bawled love song resounded among the hills for a long time, dispelling the stillness of the night. Weak and tired, Rnqaxji heard the song, clasped to her love's bosom. She immediately understood what the song alluded to and her heart ached. The song had extraordinary vibrancy. Many villagers were also awakened and surmised that the song was intended for Xjirimu.

After singing, the burden on Durijinbin's heart lifted as he continued walking home. It began drizzling. He walked for a long time, endlessly, it seemed to him, and he was still far from his village.

XJIRIMU IS ILL

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**X**jirimu was visibly aging, the result of her many duties. She had insomnia, was bad tempered, and periodically murmured inaudibly about her many distresses.

She waited one evening for Dalaxja to return from visiting a relative's home. She hoped he would arrive before supptime. The family finally ate supper very late, still hoping Dalaxja would come. She finally asked Rnqaxji to put a pile of straw in front of their gate for Dalaxja to set on fire when he arrived. The fire would drive away evil spirits that had followed him after his unusually long journey.

She went to bed, thinking, "Is he lying on the road drunk? Is he staying the night at a relative's home? Oh! Great Heaven, I beseech you! Let him return safely." She tossed and turned, vividly imagining a multitude of dire scenarios.

Dalaxja arrived at around midnight and pushed open the unbolted gate. Xjirimu was glad when he returned safely, but endlessly scolded him for not returning earlier. Dalaxja reacted by quickly falling asleep.

Xjirimu's painful groaning awakened Dalaxja. "What's wrong with you? Are you in pain?" he asked in concern.

"Yes, my whole body hurts, particularly my head. I'm about to vomit," Xjirimu replied weakly and brokenly. She was panting and feverish. Sweat streamed from her face. Dalaxja guessed her illness was the result of something related to his return.

"I got sick after your return. Did you light the straw we put by the gate? Did you rest before entering?" Xjirimu asked.

"Oh! I forgot! I came in without lighting the fire and resting. I knew you were waiting anxiously. Your sickness must be caused by evil spirits that followed me home. Get



up! Quickly! I'll drive them away, otherwise you may become more ill," Dalaxja ordered.

He quickly got up, went outside, pulled the front gate wide open, put a pile of straw in the center of the courtyard, twisted a bunch of straw into a torch, and told Xjirimu to squat by the straw and cover her head with her clothes. Dalaxja sipped a mouthful of rapeseed oil, blew it on the straw, lit the straw in the courtyard center, and then lit the straw torch. When it flamed brightly, Dalaxja spun it three times clockwise above her head and then counterclockwise three times. While circling, he loudly cursed the evil spirits, "*Tui!*"<sup>40</sup> There is no food to eat, no clothes to wear, no water to drink in my home. Why did you come here! Get away! Go back to your place or wherever you want!"

Xjirimu quietly squatted, covering her head with her clothes to protect herself from sparks, as the torch circled her head.

After six circles, Dalaxja ran to the gate, threw the torch through the open gate and then slammed the gate shut and bolted it from inside. He helped Xjirimu back to the *bankang* and calmed himself, believing the evil spirits had been driven from his home, and his wife would be better the next day.

Though Xjirimu felt a bit better immediately after the exorcism, she was worse the next day. She neither ate nor uttered a word and could not urinate and defecate. Her body was fiery hot. Dalaxja consulted his family *pram* as to the nature of her problem and how to successfully treat her. He knew evil spirits had caught Xjirimu the previous night and now firmly held her. It would not be easy to make them leave. Dalaxja decided to invite monks to deal with the evil spirits and cure her.

Three monks came to Dalaxja's home through the carpenter-uncle's introduction and inquired about her condition. They made several figures of barley dough representing evil spirits and cut several strips of cloth from fabric of different colors.

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<sup>40</sup> Sound of spitting.

When the sun was about to set, the monks told Dalaxja to toss all the figures and colorful cloth strips at the village entrance intersection. Dalaxja did as the monks instructed. Then he washed his hands and jumped over a fire lit at the front gate before re-entering the home.

As the monks were about to leave after receiving a donation, they said, "Now all the evil spirits have been driven from your home. These spirits are extremely happy, for they got colorful cloth which they regard as cash. Xjirimu will be fine soon."

Dalaxja and his family were again hopeful after this important rite. They believed Xjirimu would recover soon, because the evil spirits were gone. However, she did not improve. She still lay in bed, taking only small amounts of food.

"Please ignore your disease. Eat more. You will recover," Dalaxja told Xjirimu.

"I have many strange dreams. I see your mother smiling, wearing beautiful, colorful Mongghul clothes. Must we visit our ancestors' graveyard to prostrate, offer incense, and burn sacred papers?" Xjirimu asked in a trembling voice.

"Probably. Dreaming about a happy dead person wearing beautiful clothes portends agony. But we cannot visit our graveyard. Your condition is very serious, so I can't go. We will ask Sixty-nine to go. He's at his teacher's home in Rgulang Monastery learning Tibetan," Dalaxja said.

Sixty-nine was then summoned home, given juniper and yellow paper, and dispatched to their ancestral graveyard. He arrived after a day's ride. Everything in his natal village seemed strange, because he had been very young when his family left.

A clansman led him to the graveyard where Sixty-nine made a fire and burned juniper, *szuari*,<sup>41</sup> and sacred yellow paper. As he prostrated to his ancestors, he said, "I'm your younger generation. I have come from Qanzua to burn

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<sup>41</sup> Highland barley flour mixed with rapeseed oil.

paper and prostrate to you. Please forget us.<sup>42</sup> I and others, your descendants, will remember all of you forever!"

Sixty-nine filled all the small holes in the graves with piles of soil. Rodents made such holes, which had to be filled immediately or the ancestors would be unhappy and cause illness. Sixty-nine stayed overnight at a clansman's home and then rode back to his home early the next morning.

When Sixty-nine arrived, a pile of straw was by the front gate. His sisters lit it as he approached. He sat on the ground, leaned against the house wall, and rested while the fire burned. Though he wanted to walk at once into his mother's room to see her, this was only allowed after he had stayed for a period in the courtyard, eating bread and drinking tea in an effort to avoid anything that might worsen Xjirimu's illness. Sixty-nine had passed through gullies and sheltered places on his journey – areas where lurking evil spirits might have attached themselves to him. His family was happy he had safely returned, yet harbored suspicions that evils had come with him.

Dalaxja knew Xjirimu's disease was unrelated to her ancestors' graves because she was not getting better – she was getting worse. Dalaxja consulted his *pram* who indicated, "The evil spirits that have grasped Xjirimu are extremely stubborn, very cunning, and hard to dispel. Ask an experienced *nenjengui*<sup>43</sup> to help. The *pram* must work with a *nenjengui* to treat her. The *pram* won't be successful without a *nenjengui*."

It was difficult to find a *nenjengui*. Finally, Sixty-nine's teacher introduced one from Donggou who was about fifty, had white hair, and who had strange, curious facial expressions. She said, "I saw many ghosts in a gully where corpses are often cremated as I walked to your home from

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<sup>42</sup> Ancestors who remember their descendants may make them ill.

<sup>43</sup> *Nenjengui* (lit: eye-see-ghost). Men and women can both be *nenjengui* and see ghosts. *Nenjengui* cannot expel ghosts during the day and need help from a *pram*. *Nenjengui* are rare in Fulaan Nara. Most are from Haliqi.

Danyan<sup>44</sup> Village. They surrounded me and asked for food and clothes. Some cried and some laughed. They were all very hungry. Thousands of ghosts are in that gully. Some are young, and some are old. A few followed Dalaxja when he rested there the evening he returned."

At dusk she told Dalaxja to prepare a black pot. "Three ghosts have possessed Xjirimu. One is wandering inside your home. The other two were expelled by the monk's ritual. The one remaining in your home is the most cunning of the three," the *nenjengui* said, standing in the courtyard, looking in every direction. Suddenly she seemed to find something, went into the *pram* room, and prostrated three times to the *pram* while piously murmuring.

"Take your *pram* out into the courtyard. Be quick!" she commanded, gazing at a corner of the courtyard.

"It's over there! The ghost of a young girl! She's holding an empty bag. What are you doing, squatting in the corner? Don't move! If you do, I'll seize you by the throat!" she shouted furiously, pointing her finger at a courtyard corner. The *pram* was put in the courtyard center. The ghost was so terrified of the *nenjengui's* shouting and blustering and the sudden appearance of the *pram*, it was unable to move.

Following the *nenjengui's* instruction, Dalaxja covered the ghost with the big black pot, which was buried deeply at the site where the ghost was covered. After all was finished, the *nenjengui* delightedly said, "I never thought anything could be done at your home as easily as today. Sometimes it is very difficult to vanquish these ghosts. Now there are no problems at your home. Your patient will soon recover."

As expected, Xjirimu got up early from her bed the next morning, came to the *pei*, and ate breakfast with her family.

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<sup>44</sup> A Mongghul village in the north of today's Donggou Township.

## SIXTY-NINE'S SWORN BROTHER

Sixty-nine loved his study. After two years, he could speak, read, and write Tibetan. He left Rgulang Monastery and began learning Mongghul folksongs from Xoshidosirang. His new knowledge of Tibetan made it easy for him to understand and learn the songs Xoshidosirang sang. He read Mongghul folksong manuscripts in Tibetan from his teacher and other singers and soon became a locally well-known singer. He participated in competitions with famous Mongghul and Tibetan singers, and was invited to sing at weddings and teach songs. At flour and oil mills, people surrounded him and asked him to sing with his appreciative audience always offering liquor. He served as matchmaker for several couples every year. His eloquence and many songs were greatly appreciated by both the bride and groom's sides.

Of his many friends, he was most intimate with Gindindarijii, a young man his age from Fulaan Nara who was keenly interested in folksongs and also studied with Xoshidosirang. He was tall, gentle, honest, and had the same ambition as Sixty-nine. They often sang and drank together. The two shared a *pei* in a home one night where they had been invited to teach songs. Before sleeping, they drank some liquor. "Ah! You are a Fulaan Nara native – why do you speak Haliqi dialect?" Gindindarijii asked.

"My family moved to Qanzua from Yomajaa Village in Haliqi when I was a child. My family was the first to move here. Later, more families moved here from the same village. We have now formed a small village in Qanzua where we all speak the Haliqi dialect," Sixty-nine explained.

"I see. How many brothers and sisters do you have?" Gindindarijii asked.

"I have no brothers. I have two older sisters. The eldest held *tulighui juuligha* and stays at home. My elder

sister married into a neighbor village. My younger sister is young and unmarried," Sixty-nine replied and then said, "And you?"

"I have three brothers and two sisters. I'm the youngest son. My oldest brother left years ago. No one knows where he is. Some say they met him near Qinghai Lake,<sup>45</sup> as he passed through on his return from Tibet with a trade caravan. Others say he herds yaks and sheep near Qinghai Lake. Mother misses him and endlessly weeps. How true the old proverb, 'Parents' hearts are filled by their children, but children's hearts are stone'," Gindindarijii said sadly.

"My mother is like yours. She often chants scriptures for me if I'm away from home for a long time," Sixty-nine said.

"My second brother became a monk in Rgulang Monastery when he was fifteen, my third brother works at home, my older sister is a nun in a nunnery on South Mountain,<sup>46</sup> and my other sister is at home. Somehow, they have to live this way," Gindindarijii said.

Abruptly, Sixty-nine covered his head with his sheepskin robe, as if about to reveal a secret, and whispered, "Can we become sworn brothers? I have no brothers. I need one."

Gindindarijii excitedly said, "Yes, of course! As long as you want to!" The two immediately reached out their arms and held each other tightly, until they slept from exhaustion some time later.

Xoshidosirang was delighted with this news and quite proud of the boys. He hoped they would work together and teach many students in the future. Xoshidosirang agreed to hold a ceremony in his home and selected a propitious day – the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month. Xoshidosirang burned a large amount of incense in his courtyard, lit three lamps in his home shrine before an image of a *pram*, and had a sheep killed and some of its blood put in two bowls on the appointed day. Xoshidosirang cut a little piece of boiled

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<sup>45</sup> Kugua Nuuri, (Kokonor, Koknor).

<sup>46</sup> South Mountain is located in today's Ledu County.

mutton from each part of the sheep, divided it between two small bowls, and offered this before the *pram*. He prostrated three times to Great Heaven and all *pram*, told the boys to stand before the *pram*, and instructed them each to hold a bowl filled with sheep blood mixed with liquor.

Xoshidosirang faced the *pram* and said, "Great Heaven and all *pram*, here are my students, Sixty-nine and Gindindarijii, the two young men standing before you. They have built a good relationship through singing and studying together. They wish to become brothers, work together, and help each other in the future as sworn brothers. Sixty-nine, make your oath now."

Sixty-nine held the bowl before his chest and said, "I will be loyal to my brother, Gindindarijii. I will stand by him in any situation. If I break my vow, may lightning strike me dead."

Gindindarijii said, "I will be loyal to my brother, regardless of the future. If I break my oath, may I be immediately blinded."

The two prostrated three times to the *pram*, drank the blood mixed with liquor, and licked the bowls. Gindindarijii presented a meter-long bolt of cloth to his new brother while Sixty-nine gave Gindindarijii a Mongghul style hat. Thus they became sworn brothers. Although they would be the same age that year, Sixty-nine was two months older and thus the elder brother.

After the rite, they sat on the *pei*, ate mutton, drank mutton broth, and sang joyously. Later, Sixty-nine took Gindindarijii to his home. Xjirimu, Dalaxja, and the rest of the family were excited to see Gindindarijii, who was now Sixty-nine's sworn brother. Dalaxja and Xjirimu were happy they had a new son, while Sixty-nine's sisters had a new brother. Gindindarijii called Xjirimu 'Mother' and Dalaxja 'Father'. Since they were now sworn brothers, they visited each other's homes on such important occasions as Spring Festival, the fifth day of the fifth lunar month, and the fifteenth day of the eighth lunar month. They invited each other to their homes as though they were family members.

Gindindarijii visited his brother's home when heavy work was being done in the fields. On Mourning Day in the

third lunar month he came in the early morning to Sixty-nine's home with his family's horses and tools, which he previously had used to help sow his older brother's cultivated land. At harvest time, he helped cart bundles of highland barley, rape, flax, and beans to the threshing ground from sloping mountain fields and did not leave until the threshing was complete. He also regularly came to help Sixty-nine in the flour and oil mills.

Sixty-nine did the same at Gindindarijii's home.





## GINDINDARIJII'S EVIL IS DISCOVERED

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One cloudy afternoon, Sixty-nine sat on the *pei* smoking his long-stem pipe and enjoying some liquor alone. It had recently rained, which meant he could not do field work, providing time to relax. Xjirimu came in and sat on the other side of the fire. From her solemn face Sixty-nine sensed she had something to tell him.

"Son, what do you know about Gindindarijii's family after so many visits to his home?" Xjirimu asked, patching Dalaxja's trousers with a piece of black cloth.

"His family condition is good. Magnificent rooms line his courtyard walls, including a two-storied wood building on the east side. His family is nice, kind, and open," Sixty-nine replied.

"You are still so childish. I have learned about his home from others!" Xjirimu said knowingly.

"What?" Sixty-nine said.

Xjirimu said, "They have *modaya*."<sup>47</sup>

"I don't think so. I never noticed anything related to that during my visits," Sixty-nine said.

"It's true! There are many *modaya* in his home. They feed them in their home and tell others how fierce and cruel they are. Nobody contacts his family. Even Gindindarijii's uncles have broken off contact. His family is isolated from everyone in his village and in the surrounding area. End your

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<sup>47</sup> There are seventy-two different manifestations of this half-ghost and half-god being who live in rich homes, manifest as cats, and are visible only to those who honor them. They are faithful and when their masters ask, bring things from other homes. They do not bring coins, which *modaya* find too heavy to move. They are very selfish and worry visitors will take things from their master's home when leaving.

relationship with him at once! Otherwise, it is hard to imagine what might befall you and our family. We are so lucky to have learned this dreadful information," Xjirimu said, stopping her sewing and sternly gazing at Sixty-nine.

"I still don't believe it. My younger brother's home is just like everybody else's. We are sworn brothers. I need him, and he needs me. We cannot separate," Sixty-nine said earnestly, helping himself to another cup of liquor.

"It will be too late if those ghosts really trouble you in the future. I heard one villager visited his home, was invited to sit on their *pei*, and served food. During this time a few *modaya* stealthily came out, walked to the *pei*, and gazed at him. The *modaya* hated him because he ate a lot in their master's home. As he was leaving, he took a short piece of wire from the courtyard to use to mend his work tools. The *modaya* saw this and followed him home. That night, he became delirious, and yelled, 'How dare you take it! I will give you shit if you want to take it!' His family was astonished and informed their *pram*. They later learned the man had been made ill by the *modaya*. The man finally recovered using the *pram's* remedy," Xjirimu said, describing what had happened as vividly as though she had personally experienced it.

She provided another example: "This is also related to your brother's home. A woman escaped after her husband beat her at night and fled to Gindindarijii's front gate, where she was invited to stay overnight. She had a pair of silver hairpins in her hair. The *modaya* eagerly wanted them, but wanted to avoid a struggle. The next day when the woman left, a *modaya* followed and choked her to death when she reached a gully, then took the silver hairpins."

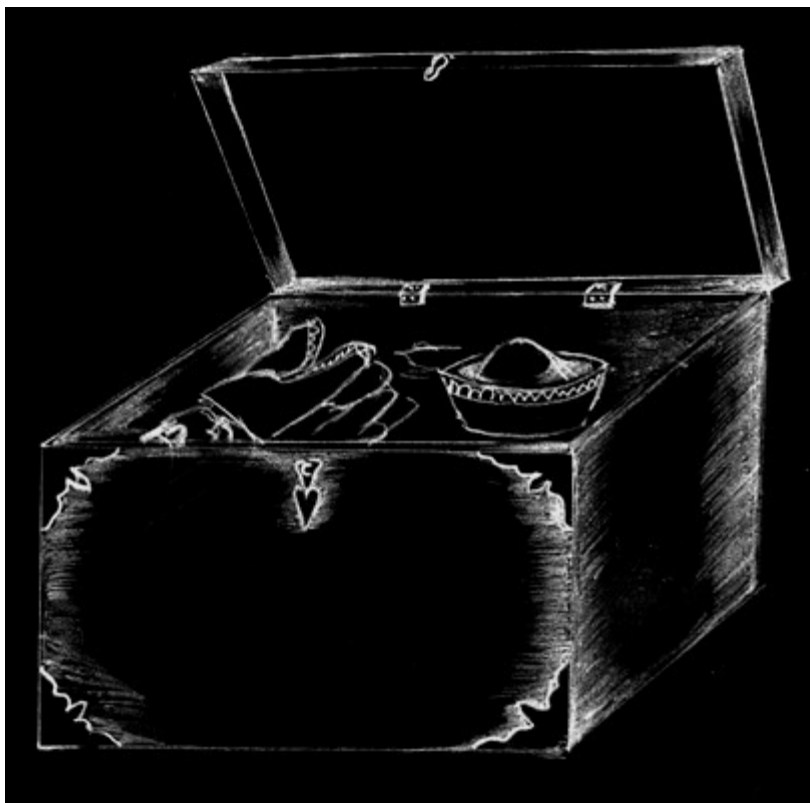
Sixty-nine bowed his head. He was afraid and did not know what to do.

"I'm going to cook supper. We'll have a nice meal. We haven't had *findin*<sup>48</sup> for a long time. I'll cook it tonight. Your elder sister, Durijixji, is here from her husband's home. She'll stay only a couple of days," Xjirimu said and left.

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<sup>48</sup> Boiled dumplings stuffed with fatty pork.

Sixty-nine was afraid of *modaya* but unwilling to end his relationship with Gindindarijii, because he had made a vow of eternal brotherhood before a *pram*.



GIVING A NAME

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**X**jirimu's family tensely waited for Rnqaxji to give birth one autumn afternoon. Her belly had begun aching early in the morning and, by late night, she still had not delivered. Xjirimu impatiently waited in Rnqaxji's room to help. Rnqaxji was in much pain and constantly groaned.

Dalaxja climbed to the roof and stamped furiously above Rnqaxji's head, hoping to relieve her pain. Dalaxja decided evil spirits must have bound her body and prevented her from giving birth. He took a few crumbs of barley bread in his hand, mixed them with wetted ash from the hearth, and entered Rnqaxji's room. "*Tui!*" he spat on the ash-bread-mixture and then patted it on Rnqaxji's body, holding the mixture in his hand saying, "There is no food in my home and no clothes for you to wear in my home. Why do you act like this? Get out!" Then he raced outside, threw the ash-bread out of the courtyard, and tightly bolted the gate. The family was somewhat comforted after Dalaxja expelled the evil spirits, thinking Rnqaxji and her baby would now be fine.

Indeed, a boy was born a bit later and Rnqaxji and the infant were both fine. All the family was delighted, particularly Xjirimu and Dalaxja, because they now had a grandson and no longer needed to worry about the continuance of their family lineage. Dalaxja attached a cypress branch on the left side of the front gate roof, indicating a son was born and announcing no visitors should come for a month.

A month later, Xjirimu and her daughters prepared steamed bread buns and offered some to their *pram*. Meanwhile, Dalaxja offered a sacrificial fire to Great Heaven and all *pram*, and burned much incense. The entire family prostrated three times. Village elders were invited to join,

and the main part of the ceremony was performed. They all sat on the *pei*. Xjirimu and Dalaxja wore their best clothes and occupied the most importance places on the *pei*. Dalaxja asked Rnqaxji to bring his grandson. This was the first time he had seen the boy. He took the baby in his arms, kissed him, and passed him on until all family members and visitors had greeted him in the same way. He then congratulated Rnqaxji for giving birth to such a lovely son.

"Please name our grandson. Have you thought of an excellent name?" Dalaxja asked Xjirimu.

"No. It's too early, particularly since he is a boy. It is our first time to name a grandchild. This is something you should do," Xjirimu replied politely.

"OK, I thought of three names. But, in any case, I think Sangrijijaxi is the best name, because it means '*pram*' and long life. I declare that our grandson's name is Sangrijijaxi," Dalaxja said proudly and happily.

"Oh, what a great name!" everyone exclaimed.

"Now, let me see what kind of life Sangrijijaxi will have," Dalaxja said holding Sangrijijaxi. Thread, a pair of scissors, pieces of bread, toys, a pen, a book, and copper coins had been placed on a small rectangular table on the *pei*.

"Oh, he will have enough food and won't worry about hunger," Dalaxja said when Sangrijijaxi's hand touched the bread first.

"Oh! Look! My grandson will be a scholar," Dalaxja exclaimed when Sangrijijaxi's hand touched the pen. Then the visitors began drinking, and eating bread and mutton. Later, they enjoyed the many songs that were sung.

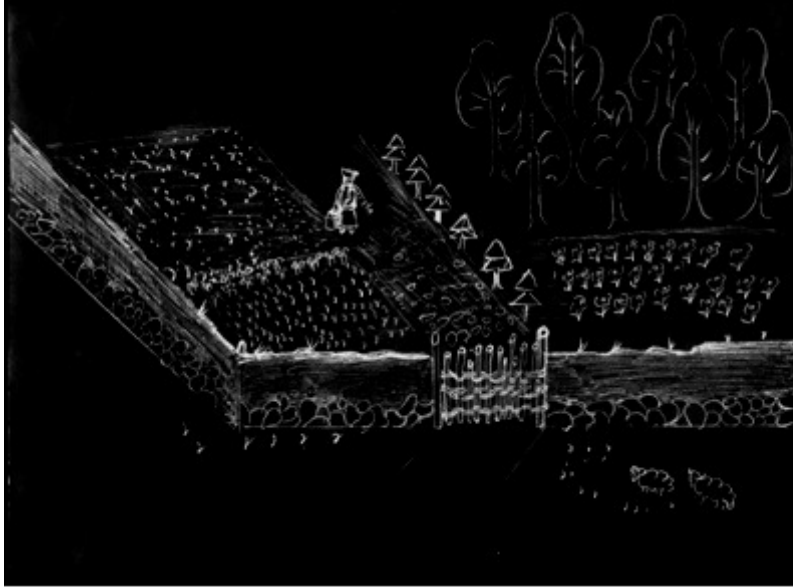
Following the day of the name-giving, each village family sent a representative with gifts<sup>49</sup> to visit and congratulate the family on the birth. Most visitors were women, who visited Rnqaxji's chamber offering gifts, extended congratulations, held the infant, and commented on how clever and cute he was. No one dared say who he

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<sup>49</sup> Gifts on this occasion usually include two big round baked wheat loaves (with a diameter of about seventy centimeters), cloth, and eggs. Wheat was rarely eaten locally at this time. Barley bread was more common.

resembled,<sup>50</sup> because everybody knew Rnqaxji was a *tulighui juuligha* woman. Her son was a constant topic of discussion among villagers and relatives, who speculated on who the father might be. Rnqaxji was also uncertain as to who the father was.

Xjirimu offered the visitors food and put gifts of bread in their bags when they left.



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<sup>50</sup> People often comment that a baby resembles his mother or father.

## TROUBLE FROM A SWORN BROTHER

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**X**jirimu heard someone call from outside the front gate one afternoon. She opened the gate and found it was Gindindarijii. He was leading a white horse with a *dalen* stuffed with gifts. He had come to congratulate Rnqaxji on the birth of her baby. He was exhausted from his long journey. Xjirimu's mouth fell open. She did not know how to deal with his sudden visit. Slapping a constrained smile on her face, she greeted him, but did not allow him to enter until Rnqaxji brought straw, lit it, and he stepped over it.

Gindindarijii placed his gifts of bread and two sheep legs on the chest in the main room. He was invited to sit on the *pei* and treated with food. That night only Sixty-nine sat and chatted with him. Rnqaxji did not bring out the new baby and Dalaxja and Xjirimu did not appear again after his arrival. He found this strange and very different from his previous visits, when he had been treated as a family member, with warm faces and nice food.

He dared not ask Sixty-nine why. However, because of the tone of his voice and uneasy expression, Sixty-nine knew Gindindarijii was aware that the family was uncomfortable. Gindindarijii knew he should leave as soon as possible the next morning. A strong force seemed to push him out of the home and Sixty-nine did not encourage him to stay longer.

As Gindindarijii rode along a narrow, steep track some distance from Sixty-nine's household, he noticed two sheep legs and bread discarded in a ditch. He was sure they were his gifts. He guessed Xjirimu had heard about his family background, and was now afraid to see him and afraid of his gifts. He also was certain Sixty-nine's parents wished to end his sworn-brother relationship with their son. Sixty-nine had behaved as usual during his visit, though Gindindarijii guessed Sixty-nine must feel very badly. Realizing his best

friend must soon forsake him, he bowed his head and listlessly rode back home.

After seeing Gindindarijii off, Sixty-nine strode into his parents' room demanding to know why they had treated his brother so impolitely.

Xjirimu angrily shouted, "Who is more important? Gindindarijii or our little boy? After Gindindarijii arrived, the baby cried endlessly. He must have been uncomfortable. I already told you Gindindarijii's background. He keeps evil spirits in his home. No one contacts such people. Our baby has only improved since your father threw away the gifts he brought. Worthless boy! Will you destroy our family? End contact with him! Our family will be isolated from others if you continue. Have you heard what people say about you? You have two choices: Gindindarijii or our family. Go far away if you keep Gindindarijii as your brother. Otherwise, end contact with him now. If you have Gindindarijii, then, you have no mother or family, and if you have your mother, then you have no Gindindarijii," Xjirimu concluded ferociously.



## SIXTY-NINE IS BEATEN

On frigid winter days, people sat around the fire on the *pei*. The river was a thick, solid sheet of ice. White snow covered mountains and plains. The weak winter sun tried to supply warmth to the world, but the boundless snowy land looted it all, secreting it deep in its bosom. The air even seemed chillier on the snowy land where the sun scattered its rays. Occasionally, a few old men sat on the warmer, leeward sides of village lanes, puffing on their pipes and endlessly gossiping and enjoying their lives. Children played games on manure piles in front of home gates. Some children, despite the cold, were barefoot and wore no trousers. Their feet and hands bled from chilblains, belied by their cheerful laughs and energetic running and leaping. Squawking crows circled in the sky seeking food below.

Hearing the crows, Xjirimu came out from Rnqaxji's chamber, looked into the sky, and scolded "*Gua... gua...* I'll put shit in your mouths. Shut up! Get away!" She was anxious for Dalaxja to return from Rgulang Monastery, where he had gone on behalf of their listless grandson, who had a bad cough.

Dalaxja finally returned, clad in a long lambskin robe and wearing a fox fur hat. He handed his *dalen* to Xjirimu and walked straight into the kitchen, where he put his stone-cold hands near the fire. He asked Xjirimu to sit by him after he settled on the *pei*, "Today, our carpenter-uncle and I went to a fortune-teller monk's home. He said our grandson has been possessed by an evil spirit from the south. He also said Sangrijijaxi is not a proper name and that he needs to be renamed Darijii. Furthermore, his hair must not be cut until he is seven years old and his neck should be locked with a metal chain to protect him from evil spirits."

"My suspicions were right. Sangrijijaxi became ill when Gindindarijii visited. His home is in Xranghuali Village<sup>51</sup> in the Lajangja Area, which lies south of our home. The monk is exactly correct! Gindindarijii must not visit again, and we must end Sixty-nine's relationship with him," Xjirimu said firmly.

Their grandson was renamed Darijii the next day, his hair went uncut, and a chain was put around his neck in the hope he would have a long life.

Some weeks later, Gindindarijii missed Sixty-nine and mounted his horse to visit. When he reached the main entrance of Sixty-nine's village, he saw a woman pounding hard chunks of manure with a mallet in front of Sixty-nine's home. He was happy that there were people in Sixty-nine's home, dismounted, and directly walked toward Sixty-nine's home. Suddenly the woman took her mallet and dashed into her home. When he pushed on the gate he found it was bolted. He called, "Open the gate, please!" but no response came, as though no one was home. "Brother Sixty-nine, please come open the gate. I'm Gindindarijii. I've come to visit!" he shouted. There was no response.

All Sixty-nine's family were at home. Dalaxja cruelly brandished a whip in front of Sixty-nine as he tried to open the gate. Xjirimu held Sixty-nine's sleeve and stopped him from reaching the front gate. Giving up, Sixty-nine hopelessly climbed up on the house roof and lay on his back, stretching out his arms. His ears rang painfully from his brother's calls. His heart bled. He crawled to the roof edge, and peeked over at Gindindarijii who stood there, his eyes fixed on the front gate, waiting, hoping someone would open it. At this unbearable scene, Sixty-nine jerked his head back and buried his head in his arms.

Gindindarijii hopelessly turned and led his horse despondently into the village lane. His horse slouched too, in sympathy with its master. Gindindarijii understood that what had happened was not Sixty-nine's wish and, in the depths of his heart, he regretted having been born in such a home. He wondered why his destiny was so cruel. He hated himself.

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<sup>51</sup> Today's Hongyazigou Township.

He sadly walked to the main village entrance. Dalaxja, Xjirimu, and everyone except Sixty-nine breathed a sigh of relief once they knew Gindindarijii was gone.

Sixty-nine did not see Gindindarijii in the ensuing several months, but he often thought about him. He decided to visit and lied to his parents that he was going to a song competition. When he reached Gindindarijii's home, he pushed the gate open and walked inside. Gindindarijii's family was delighted to see him. Gindindarijii walked forward and clutched Sixty-nine's hands tightly, warm tears brimming in his bright brown eyes. He was excited but worried that Sixty-nine's parents would learn he had visited his home and perhaps never allow him to enter his home again, or beat him so seriously that he would be unable to walk.

Sixty-nine had never seen anything related to *modaya* in Gindindarijii's home during his visits. Gindindarijii's home was like any other. But Sixty-nine did notice was that he was always the only visitor. Gindindarijii never mentioned anything about the absence of guests or their relationship with others. The key impression Sixty-nine had was that his family was kind and polite and that it was unfair that they were so despised by others.

Sixty-nine and Gindindarijii got drunk together and were extraordinarily talkative, fueled by their long separation. Gindindarijii asked Sixty-nine to lie on the warm inner side of the *pei* and said, "I'm so pleased you courageously visited. I thought you would never visit after I was denied entry to your home. I knew people were in your home and also that it was not your decision. You are my only friend and my only sworn brother. Only you dare be my friend in this life. Everyone else avoids me because my family has *modaya*."

"I don't care about any of that. I have you forever. You are my brother for my whole life," Sixty-nine said.

"It's difficult to keep our vows of brotherhood. I worry about you because of your parents. You will lose your family if you keep me," Gindindarijii replied.

"I will stay in secret contact with you, because you are my sworn brother. We took an oath before *pram* and

Heaven. I am your brother forever," Sixty-nine replied emotionally.

Gindindarijii uncertainly buried his head in his sheepskin cover and groaned.

"I'm beside you always!" Sixty-nine said firmly.

"My family is isolated from everyone. We are alone. None visit and we dare not visit others. Everyone avoids us. This is why one of my brothers left home to become a herdsman near Qinghai Lake, why a second brother became a monk, and why my sister became a nun. My third brother is unmarried because no one will allow their daughter to marry and come live here. My other sister is unmarried because my family is believed to have *modaya*," Gindindarijii said and began sobbing.

Sixty-nine silently wiped his tears away with his hand.

"I know I cannot visit you but I don't want to lose you. Don't be discouraged if we seldom see each other. Your parents are not wrong. They have their ideas about you contacting me – a dreadful, frightening man. Your family will become as isolated as mine if you continue to visit me," Gindindarijii said.

Days passed and then Gindindarijii heard that Sixty-nine's father and clan members had hung Sixty-nine from the house roof upside down, and beaten him after learning he had visited Gindindarijii's home. Sixty-nine was so injured he lay on the *pei* for several days without food or drink, his body swollen and torn.

Gindindarijii decided to take responsibility for his brother's suffering and leave. Sixty-nine would never find him and he his family would resume its harmonious, peaceful existence. He would go far away and no one would ever know his situation, and he would never hear mention of Sixty-nine, his own home, and village.

One morning, he ate some potatoes and drank black tea that his mother had boiled. He told her that he was going to see his elder brother and would return soon. She put bread in his small woven shoulder bag. She was glad to hear that he was visiting his brother.

He walked toward Qinghai Lake for days. He begged for food when he was hungry and lodged with farmers and herdsmen who lived by the trail at night. He slept in caves and near boulders. When he felt tired, he put three stones together, made a fire, and boiled water in a simple clay pot.

Days passed. Finally, the boundless waters of Qinghai Lake appeared. He had reached his destination. He walked along the shore, thinking about his brother. Tibetan and Mongol caravans and pilgrims passed by. Some were alone. There were also groups of monks and herdsmen who walked one step forward, stopped, and prostrated, thus piously circumambulating the holy lake. On the vast grassland and near this immense inland ocean, they seemed tiny and powerless but the power of their belief transformed them.

One day after endless inquiry, Gindindarijii found his brother in a Tibetan tent. He had long hair and from the shape of his fox-fur-lined hat and wide sheepskin robe collar, he realized his brother had become Tibetan. He had his own yaks and sheep and lived with his Tibetan wife and two children. They were delighted to be reunited. Gindindarijii explained why he had left home and stayed in his brother's tent for some months. He later married his brother's wife's sister and thus started a life as a herdsman, tending sheep and yaks on the grassland. He bought the needed equipment and distilled liquor from barley, which he drank with his brother and Tibetan herdsmen. Though he had a life with a family, a strong sense of homesickness told him he would never be truly happy in this foreign land. He incessantly thought about his birth place where his mother waited for news about him and his brother, and where Sixty-nine and Xoshidosirang waited for him to join their singing and drinking.

Later, he moved his tent near the road to meet more passersby. Some were from Huarai,<sup>52</sup> his home area. He chatted with them and asked if they had food and wanted to stay overnight in his tent. He was eager for news of his

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<sup>52</sup> Huarai refers to today's Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County, Gansu Province, and Huzhu Mongghul Autonomous County, Qinghai Province.

home. Sometimes, he sat by the road drinking liquor and singing in Tibetan. Most local herdsmen did not understand his songs sung in the Huarai Tibetan dialect.



## AN UNCLEAN GROOM

Dalaxja returned home from shopping in Zanghgua<sup>53</sup> one afternoon with a tea brick, farm tools, and cloth for clothes for his third daughter, who would marry a few months later. After supper they went to bed early. Dalaxja said, "I heard special news today!"

"What?" Xjirimu asked.

"I was told that the family of the boy our third daughter, Sanjii, is engaged to, has *hanqi shduri*,"<sup>54</sup> Dalaxja replied.

"Who told you? Is it true?" Xjirimu asked.

"It's credible. I chatted and smoked with a man in Zanghgua. He's from the boy's neighbor village, and knows his family. He said the boy's home has a stained reputation, because his grandfather's wife had *hanqi shduri*. Their family did not know this before they arranged the marriage. Everybody there knows," Dalaxja said.

"In that case, we must stop contact with the family, otherwise our family will be stained, and it will be hard to find a wife for our son and later descendants," Xjirimu replied.

"Let's wait, and probe further into this. The boy's side has already sent most of the betrothal gifts, and the wedding date is approaching. The boy is strong, tall, very good-

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<sup>53</sup> Zanghgua Village is located in today's Wushi Town, Huzhu County. It was a small trade center in Wushi Valley.

<sup>54</sup> (Lit. long sleeves.) Mongghul do not wish to marry those with 'armpit odor'. If one side hears that the other side has 'armpit odor' the engagement process stops immediately. Families are afraid that their 'neat' reputation will be ruined if a 'strong, bad smelling' spouse joins their family.

looking, and must be a good worker. He can surely help our daughter both in and out of his home," Dalaxja replied regretfully.

They asked many people in the following days and were assured that the boy's home indeed had *hanqi shduri*. Finally, Dalaxja and Xjirimu decided to cancel the marriage, but they first needed their daughter's permission.

The next afternoon, Xjirimu found Sanjii busily embroidering for her wedding. Xjirimu sat near her and said, "Daughter, Mother wants you to know something. We believe the boy's family has *hanqi shduri*. Your father and I think it is not a proper family for you to join. It will damage our family's reputation, and it is bad for you. What do you think?"

Sanjii silently continued embroidering.

Xjirimu knew that Sanjii liked the boy after meeting him at a masked dance festival at Rgulang Monastery, on the eighth day of the sixth lunar month. Sanjii had attended the festival, hoping to see her future husband. Someone pointed him out, and she had peeked at him from a distance, afraid he might notice if she drew nearer. He wore a long, wool gown tied with an embroidered sash, a *xjiuniuri*,<sup>55</sup> which set off his handsome face, and a new black lambskin hat. His handsome figure attracted many eyes in the huge crowd. Later, two young men came with a ball of white yarn and colorful threads – gifts from Zhunmaasarishiden.

Sanjii bashfully accepted them as she noticed Zhunmaasarishiden standing some distance away. Customarily, a couple did not talk to each other before the wedding. Some couples did not even converse until some days after the wedding ritual.

On her way home after the gathering, her village companions teased her about how lucky she was to have such a handsome man and looked at her enviously. Sanjii was so excited to have seen her future husband that she had trouble sleeping. She was sure she had found an ideal man

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<sup>55</sup> Square colorful embroidery sewn on a shirt at the middle upper part. This dress decoration is only for men.



and impatiently waited for the wedding and the start of their life together.

A rainy day some time later, Dalaxja and Xjirimu invited the matchmaker to their home, explained the situation, and asked him to return all the betrothal gifts to the boy's family, with the excuse that their daughter was too young and needed to stay home for a couple of more years to help her parents work in the fields. They said they would consider a marriage proposal a few years later, when she had reached marriageable age. The boy's parents were shocked when they received this message. They knew it was a pretext and surmised someone had slandered them.

Sanjii understood she would never marry Zhunmaasarishiden when the matchmaker returned the gifts. She also realized it was somehow the best for her and her family, because her family was 'neat'. She could not taint her family reputation for all ensuing generations, handicapping her descendants' later marriage prospects.

A SINGING COMPETITION

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Summer is a wonderful season, particularly in July, when several love-song meetings are held in succession. Farmers have completed their heavy farm work, and participate in festivals regardless of age and sex. Sometimes villages are almost completely deserted during these meetings. They are times to meet relatives and friends and recall the past. Young people look for lovers. Young couples sit together under trees, on slopes, and by the riverside, exchanging intimate feelings, whispering and giggling now and again, and hiding behind large umbrellas to avoid being recognized by others. Occasionally, they burst into song, expressing intimate, romantic thoughts, hopes, and dreams.

The atmosphere is highly charged with the possibility of romance as a husband pursues a lover, while his wife searches for her own. Each understands the other and talking and being intimate with their sweethearts is perfectly justified and natural. There are no complaints and recriminations during and after the song festival.

One morning, Sixty-nine put on new Mongghul clothes and prepared to attend such a meeting, hoping to meet one of his several lovers. He led his horse over the hill behind his village and suddenly saw a man approaching on a white horse. He recognized the horse as belonging to one of his folksong partners, Limusaizhuu. The two met, sat on a grassy hillside, took out their pipes from their sashes, and smoked.

Limusaizhuu's solemn expression suggested he had something urgent to say and after a few minutes he explained. Xoshidosirang had summoned him to his home. Sixty-nine was upset. He had been happily going to meet a lover with some gifts. He was at marriageable age and his parents often urged him to marry. Finally, he decided to go to his teacher's home.

When they reached their teacher's village, Xoshidosirang was standing at his front gate, happily waiting for them, pleased they had come so quickly. Two other of Xoshidosirang's students had already arrived, and were sitting on the *pei*, sipping milk tea and drinking liquor. Sixty-nine and his friend were asked to sit on the *pei* and were offered bread, black tea, and liquor.

Xoshidosirang said, "I asked you to come because an outstanding singer from the Shdara<sup>56</sup> area has challenged us to a folksong competition in Kushinzhang<sup>57</sup> on the fifteenth day of the sixth lunar month, which is the day after tomorrow. This is a challenge and a tribute to us. We must leave this afternoon. I'll tell you more on the way there. Eat quickly. We will set off soon."

Xoshidosirang and his students lit a big offering fire on the garden platform located at the courtyard center, and prostrated to Great Heaven and all the spirits before leaving. They were fully prepared with a cloth tent and a few utensils. They all rode at a trot to Kushinzhang.

Xoshidosirang explained, "The singer is Gindirinqan. He is around sixty, has many students, and is quite famous in his home area. He has participated in countless folksong competitions, particularly with Tibetans. He believes he is the best folksong singer in our Mongghul area. He has won most of his competitions and wants to defeat us. That's his purpose. Let's see who is the best singer in this area!"

"He will not win this time. We have studied and sung for many years. Besides, our teacher will guide us, and all of us will unite. I think we will surely win," Sixty-nine said confidently.

"I agree. Anyway, it is a chance for us to test our ability. Even if we are defeated, we will learn more," Xoshidosirang said.

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<sup>56</sup> Located in today's Ledu County, Qinghai Province.

<sup>57</sup> This herding area is on the border of Menyuan Hui Autonomous County, Ledu County, Datong Hui and Mongghul Autonomous County, and Huzhu Mongghul Autonomous County.

They dismounted when they reached the foot of a towering, steep mountain, and slowly climbed up a zigzag path to a huge *lasizi*<sup>58</sup> on the mountain top. They delighted the *lasizi* deity by circling, burning incense, prostrating, and tossing yellow, sacred paper in the air.

A magnificent view overlooking the surrounding landscape presented itself with flocks of sheep and yak herds sprinkled about on the green slopes. Huge birds hovered in the sky. Columns of smoke rose from the herdsmen's tents. Occasionally, a graceful song echoed through the valley. Xoshidosirang and his students were intoxicated by the beautiful herding songs, sat on the ground, took out their pipes, and placidly enjoyed the scenes and songs.

Standing on the mountain top looking over to the other side of the mountain, Xoshidosirang said, "That is the Kushinzhang area. We have nearly arrived. Someone from Gindinrinqan's side will be waiting for us at the foot of the mountain." Then they descended the mountain along the serpentine path. Indeed, two men who had been dispatched by Gindinrinqan were waiting for them at the bottom. They were each offered three cups of liquor and *kadog*. "Please follow us. We will lead you to our teacher," the two men said.

They mounted their horses and galloped ahead, followed by Xoshidosirang and his students and entered a narrow valley surrounded by cliffs. A meandering, clear stream flowed through the deep valley. They felt awestruck by the remarkable landscape.

"Why did they select such a strange, fearful place for a folksong competition?" Sixty-nine asked in surprise.

"People choose a sequestered place like this to avoid disturbance from the outside," Xoshidosirang replied knowingly and burst into laughter.

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<sup>58</sup> A Tibetan term (*lab tse*) for what in Mongol is *oboo*. Many *lasizi* have a square stone hollow base rimmed by a low wood railing. Many poles resembling arrows and spears are inserted into the *lasizi*. They are consecrated to Heaven and various deities, particularly mountain deities.

At their destination they found two black, yak-hair tents pitched on a small patch of grass by the stream. Gindinrinqan and his companions walked forward, and welcomed them with warmed local liquor and *kadog*, for they had come a long way.

After drinking milk tea and eating bread, Gindinrinqan asked his students to help Xoshidosirang pitch tents just opposite theirs, with only about three meters separating them.

In the spacious valley, flecks of lily white moonlight on the murmuring stream rendered the night peaceful and harmonious. Silver birches and pine trees swayed amid gentle breezes.

The men gathered and talked under a butter-wick-lamp in the tent, while sipping tea and liquor offered by Gindinrinqan. After long discussion, Gindinrinqan summarized the schedule and rules, "First, we are delighted that you have come. There are five participants from each side. Two other men have come to fill our tea bowls, offer liquor and bread, and care for our horses while we sing. The rule is to sing questions and answers. The loser is the side who cannot answer."

They got up early the next morning and made a big offering of incense on a boulder located on a high slope. They all stood in a line in front of the incense while Gindinrinqan loudly announced, gazing up at the sky, "Great Heaven, our competition will soon begin. We hope our songs will forever be learned and sung."

Afterward, each party returned to their own tents. The front parts of the tents were wide open so that both sides saw each other easily, face to face. They sat cross-legged on small square blankets spread in a line on the grass. The teachers sat in the middle. Everyone looked solemn, as if a violent war without weapons would ensue.

Gindinrinqan started singing in Tibetan without announcement from inside their tent. Xoshidosirang quickly identified the song as '*Huni*', which they answered easily from inside their tent. They sang from early morning to late night until, on the third day, Gindinrinqan thought, "This

song is considered the most difficult but it is easy for them to answer. I'll choose another."

"Now it's time for supper. We will resume after supper," Gindinrinqan announced.

"What's wrong with Gindinrinqan? Why did he cancel the song so suddenly? The song would have soon ended," Sixty-nine said.

"He knows he cannot defeat us with this song. He's thinking of another song. Let's see what his next weapon is!" Xoshidosirang answered.

Indeed, as Xoshidosirang predicted, Gindinrinqan announced cunningly, "The song we are singing is about to finish. Both sides are familiar with it. We don't need to finish it. To have further exchange and learn from each other I, a most insignificant singer, will sing a new song. Please, all of you great singers, point out any errors I make."

Xoshidosirang's side identified his second song as '*Szii*', which also was sung in Tibetan. The singing continued for three more days and nights. When this song concluded, Xoshidosirang and his students had successfully answered all the questions in the song.

Gindinrinqan had again failed and was at a loss. He had no idea as to how to further his plan. One of his students then asked him to go outside to pee. The student suggested they next sing '*Qarog*'. He had heard that Xoshidosirang paid little attention to this song and rarely sang it. Hearing this, Gindinrinqan regretted he had not used this weapon earlier and energetically returned to their tent.

However, Gindinrinqan found Xoshidosirang's side easily answered the sung questions. Xoshidosirang's group was becoming increasingly active and energetic. Gindinrinqan stopped this third song after only one day, otherwise, several more days and nights would have been required to finish it. Gindinrinqan was embarrassed. Giving an excuse, he led his students from the tents some distance away to discuss what to do next.

One student suggested, "We chose songs and sang questions first. Why don't we now ask them to sing questions, and we will answer? Let's see what songs they have. Probably they can't find one to compete with us. "

Gindinrinqan agreed.

The next morning, Xoshidosirang was asked to start singing. This upset him. He turned to Sixty-nine and asked him to select a song and begin singing. Sixty-nine burst into a Mongghul song without hesitation:

Mongghul Khan's descendants,  
Singing our Mongghul songs.  
The sun and moon are together,  
Which one is first?  
Which one is last?  
Why is it first?  
Why is it last?  
Please answer our song.

Sixty-nine's song had an immediate effect. Gindinrinqan's singers were in open-mouthed astonishment. They had no answers and were enraged and embarrassed. They scolded Xoshidosirang's side for singing such an unmentionable song, though they all knew it was widely sung in Mongghul areas.

Gindinrinqan and his students had learned long literary pieces in Tibetan, believing only these songs were suitable for competitions and ignored common songs sung in Mongghul. They left their tent in embarrassment and shame.

Later, Gindinrinqan and his students moved their tents some distance away in order to make a new, secret plan. They knew it would be terribly humiliating if they could not defeat their opponents, especially since they had initiated the competition.

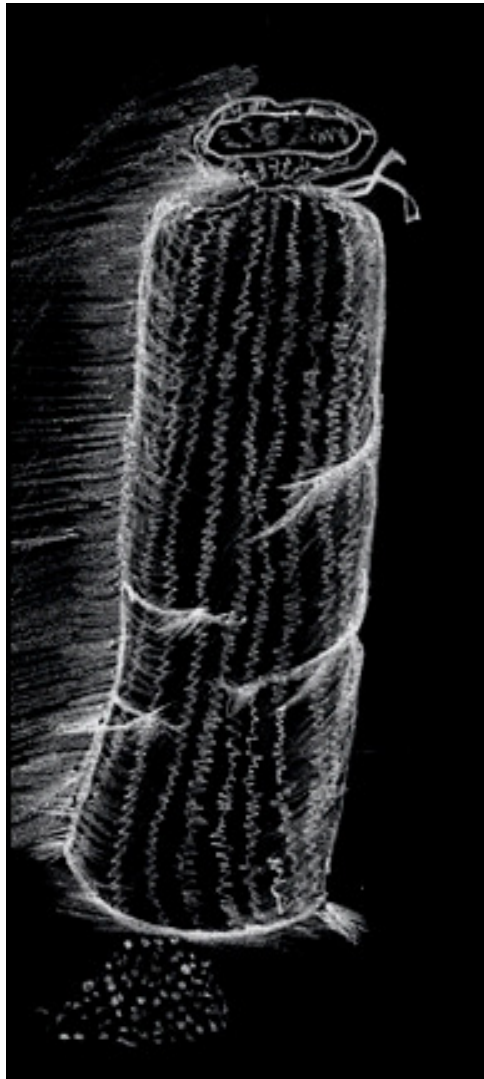
No one slept in Xoshidosirang's tent. It was clear they had won and disaster might come rather than blessings if they stayed longer. It would be hard for Gindinrinqan to find a new song to continue the competition. Besides, they had heard Gindinrinqan was bad tempered and would seek revenge, possibly by starting a fight. They packed up and left before dawn.

The next morning, Gindinrinqan and his group came with several other people but found nothing except the tent. Gindinrinqan looked skyward, laughed loudly, and said,

"How sharp-witted Xoshidosirang is! He really is a singer in our Mongghul area!" and then they set fire to Xoshidosirang's tent.

Gindinrinqan had asked two young local men to come and insult Xoshidosirang and, at the least, they planned to steal the visitors' horses in revenge.

Afterwards, Xoshidosirang, Sixty-nine, and the other participants' fame grew.





A DONKEY WEARS A HEADDRESS

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**D**urijixji was a thoughtful, intelligent woman. She wanted respect and a good life in her husband's home and village. Because of this, she got up early every morning, cooked breakfast for the family, cleaned the rooms, fed the swine, swept the courtyard, and fetched water unlike many other wives who often visited their parents' homes and worked as little as possible in their husbands' homes. New wives were normally allowed to visit their parents' homes after a year.

Durijixji's parents-in-law felt happy and lucky to have such a hard-working, kindhearted, and filial wife in their home. Durijixji, too, felt satisfied with her life at her new home, which was located near enough her parents' home that she could regularly visit. The family was thus both happy and harmonious.

A village located at the foot of a mountain or halfway up a mountain is a favorable place to live. Livestock may be grazed on the mountainsides and firewood and wood to use in constructing houses is not a worry because of the mountain forests.

Groups of people from the plains came and collected juniper branches to burn as incense, cut wood and carted it away for house construction and fuel, and collected shrubs for making pot-cleaning brushes and brooms. Durijixji's village was often praised and regarded as an ideal location by summer visitors. Increasingly, Mongghul moved from the plains to live in these mountain areas.

Durijixji's husband's family had yaks, goats, and sheep. In summer some of her family drove the livestock to high mountains, where they had a stone enclosure and two simple wood rooms. The livestock grazed here in summer.

When the weather turned cold, they drove them down to the village. Milk, yogurt, and meat were plentiful.

Durijixji went to fetch water as usual one early morning and did not put on her headdress, for it was inconvenient to wear when carrying water. When she returned out-of-breath with two buckets of water, she was astounded to see a familiar, colorful object on the head of the family's donkey, which was being fiercely beaten by her father-in-law. Her new headdress was on the donkey's head and her new long, silver earrings were on the donkey's ears. Her father-in-law beat the donkey in a circle around the small garden plot.

Seeing Durijixji standing at the gate, her father-in-law cracked his whip, lashed the donkey, and scolded, "You don't want to wear them? Fine. Now the donkey wears them," and resumed thrashing the donkey, which crazily ran about the courtyard.

Her mother-in-law was peering out from a half-opened window on the *pei*. Durijixji was shocked, put down the water buckets, tossed her shoulder pole to one side, flew into her room, slammed the door behind her, flopped down on her bed, covered her head with her coarse sheep-skin bed cover, and wept endlessly. Her father-in-law had terribly insulted her. It was one of the most humiliating experiences in her life. She dared not be seen by others in the village. She had never even heard of anything like this.

Time passed and quiet fell. No more tears flowed down her face, though her heart still ached. She sat up, peeped through the window, and saw the setting sun shining sideways in the upper courtyard. The exhausted, broken donkey quietly stood trembling next to the house. Her brand new headdress drooped down from the donkey, tassels dangling.

She heard murmuring from the *pei* where her parents-in-law sat around the smoldering fire, probably talking about the lesson given that morning. It was their duty to teach that lesson or their daughter-in-law would continue to shame them by appearing outside without her headdress. Mongghul women were expected to wear their headdresses in public and at home. It was particularly unacceptable to leave the home without a headdress if a *pram* was in the home. If this

happened, the *pram* would be unhappy and disease or other misfortune would strike the family.

Her mother-in-law brought barley noodles to her room that evening. She refused to eat and returned to her own village early the next morning. When she reached her home, she cried loudly, put her head on Xjirimu's bosom, and poured out all her sadness.

Xjirimu patted her head and said, "We cannot say your father-in-law's behavior was completely wrong. According to custom, you must wear a headdress at all times. This is particularly expected of young married women. You are not very tall and I understand it must be inconvenient for you to fetch water in your headdress. Please pay attention to this next time."

"No, Mother, there will be no next time. I won't return," Durijixji said.

"What do you mean?" Xjirimu said.

"I was insulted. I cannot face the people in that village. My headdress was put on the donkey's head. I will not return nor will I marry again. I will stay at home like my elder sister. How nice to stay with you," Durijixji implored tearfully.

Xjirimu urged Durijixji to return to her husband's home after she had spent some days at her home. Durijixji's husband's family sent people repeatedly to Xjirimu's home, asking her to return, but Durijixji refused, despite her parents and sisters' persuasion. Durijixji then made her life with her family as *tulighui juuligha*, though a short 'official' marriage marked a time in her life.

## DALAXJA'S FINAL SLEEP

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**A**utumn sun shone weakly as daylight grew shorter in Yomajaa Village. The crops were harvested. Most families had moved the harvested highland barley to their threshing grounds with big, round-wheeled carts, or with donkeys. The remaining harvested crops lay lined up in rows in the fields, waiting to be moved in the next few days.

Several barefoot little boys wearing thick wool clothes dug holes with a shovel in the barley stubble fields. Their feet hurt and bled from the strong sharp stubble, nevertheless, they joyfully continued playing until some tiny, fresh edible roots from rose-family bushes were dug out and served around to eat. The most excitement came when they dug mice out of their holes and chased them until they were captured or killed.

Xjirimu's family was the first that year to move its harvested crops to their threshing ground near their courtyard gate. That day her family busily prepared a rite to celebrate. They no longer needed to worry about crops being ruined by hailstones or livestock, which was the case as long as they remained in the fields. The sheaves were piled high and solidly into immense towers surrounding the threshing ground's perimeter awaiting threshing after an enjoyable thanksgiving rite was performed to Heaven and the family *pram*.

Sixty-nine and a village man, Dunzhusirang, slaughtered an ox at Sixty-nine's home. They collected the blood, mixed it with fat tissue, and stuffed it into cleaned intestines. They boiled these sausages, gut, and meat in a big pot. Xjirimu and her daughters steamed big buns stuffed with potatoes and radish, and also steamed thirteen small buns for the *pram*. Later, more meat was boiled and more bread was steamed. After everything was ready, Sixty-nine handed his

long-stem pipe and embroidered, colorful tobacco bag to Dunzhusirang, as he rested on the *pei*. Sixty-nine filled a big jug with liquor from a clay vat that stood in a corner of the *pei* all year round; Xjirimu distilled a new batch when the vat ran dry. Sixty-nine heated the homemade liquor on the smoldering fire in the center of the *pei*. "OK, let's enjoy it with meat once the rite is concluded. What a wonderful day it is! How nice to enjoy this yearly rite," Sixty-nine declared proudly, stepping down from the *pei* and walking out to the courtyard via the kitchen. He stood in the courtyard under the main room roof, stretched his arms up into the air, and yawned contentedly.

"Sanjii, please go outside and ask Father to come speak in front of the *pram*. Once that's done, all that remains to be done is to eat," Sixty-nine said.

Sanjii ran out the front gate and looked around for her father. Not finding him, she began shouting but there was still no response. She asked their neighbors if they had seen him and was told that he had driven some hogs and cattle away from her family's piled sheaves on the threshing ground.

Sanjii looked for him among the huge piles, and finally found him. His back and hip leaned against the straw. He held a string of prayer beads in his right hand and a long leather whip lay near him. His head faced the setting sun. He peacefully lay without reaction, even when Sanjii called near his ears.

"Don't disturb him. Let him enjoy his sleep. Your father enjoys sleeping, and has done so all his life. That's why he got the nickname 'Sleepy'. He can fall asleep at anytime," Xjirimu said as she joined them.

"It's time to hold the rite. Everything is ready. He must come. Be quick, let's wake him up," Sixty-nine said, also joining them. He held his father's hand, pulled, and said, "Father, please wake up. Everything is ready. Let's go home and hold the rite."

Dalaxja made no reaction. His body was stiff and motionless.

"Ah! Mother! Father is dead! He's not sleeping this time!" Sixty-nine said after verifying no breath came from his father's nostrils. He began wailing.

Everyone wept when it was further verified that Dalaxja was dead. Xjirimu sadly lamented, scolding her husband for leaving her and her family without having concluded his duty of seeing Sixty-nine and Sanjii married.

Villagers came to the threshing ground when they heard of Dalaxja's death. Dalaxja had died outside of his home, therefore, his corpse was not moved directly into his home through the front gate. Sixty-nine put his father's corpse over his shoulder and climbed over the courtyard wall using a ladder. The corpse was put in a squatting position inside an adobe brick box on the main room floor. Villagers gathered in his home and planned the funeral. A manager was soon selected. The officiant put a *kadog* on top of the bricks, and placed an oil lamp in front of the bricks. Dalaxja's wife and daughters removed their colorful clothes and donned old ones. Sixty-nine wore an old white robe using strands of hemp as a sash.

The officiant dispatched Dunzhusirang to Rgulang Monastery with bread and gifts, where he informed Xjirimu's carpenter-uncle about Dalaxja's death and asked him to come build a sedan for him.

When Dunzhusirang reached the carpenter-uncle's front gate, he saw him bent over, feeding his little yellow dog in a corner of his small, enclosed courtyard. He wore a large reddish garment with a patterned lower part. His round hat was inclined to one side.

The carpenter-uncle greeted Dunzhusirang, and asked him to sit on the heated adobe brick platform. Before Dunzhusirang could explain his visit, the carpenter-uncle said, "Oh! I heard something interesting. A miracle! I just returned from Tughuan Living Buddha's home. He has a pair of shoes he brought from Beijing during his latest visit. They are called 'rain shoes'. A miracle! Water doesn't go inside when you walk in water. It is hard to imagine what they are made of and how they function. Tughuan Living Buddha predicts that it will be possible in the future to have 'iron oxen' walking on the ground and 'iron birds' flying in the air.

How could this be? What do you think?" he asked, shaking his head in amazement.

"The shoes sound very interesting. It's hard to predict what life will be in the future. How are you recently?" Dunzhusirang asked.

"My life? Oh! Going on. Just look at me! I'm half monk, even though I have no qualification to wear a robe," he said, pointing to his red garment. "I'm aging. I haven't worked as a carpenter for a few years now. I put away my carpenter tools. I don't want to touch them again. I live alone. I don't want to spend the rest of my life in my village. I have contributed my life to Rgulang Monastery. I'm accustomed to staying here. I circumambulate the monastery at least once a day. The dog is my child now. I must give him much attention," he joked. "How is Xjirimu's family? I haven't visited for a long time," he continued.

"I've come for just that reason. Dalaxja has put down his body," Dunzhusirang answered sadly.

The carpenter-uncle fell silent and then asked, "When did he go?"

"Just before I came to visit you. I've come to invite you to his home to make his funeral sedan," Dunzhusirang said.

From the carpenter-uncle's big sigh, Dunzhusirang knew he was deeply saddened by the news of Dalaxja's death.

"What does my life mean now? Can't I still build a sedan for him?" he said, raising his head and looking out the window. His deeply-creased wrinkled face announced that he was a very old man.

They took his carpenter tools and set off. With the help of village men, they completed a sedan resembling a three-floored wood building with many beams. Carved flowers decorated the sedan, which was topped by a sun and moon. Dalaxja's corpse was placed inside in a squatting position, his palms before his face, his thumbs under his chin. The corpse was tightly wrapped with a long string and covered with yellow mourning cloth.

The carpenter-uncle asked eight monks to come chant. Villagers also came to chant at night in Xjirimu's

home, ensuring Dalaxja a smooth road to his next reincarnation. The funeral feast lasted three days. Participants were provided three meals a day. Planks were placed in rows in the courtyard, and straw was spread on both sides. Participants sat on the straw and ate and drank. At Xjirimu's suggestion, the main food in the afternoon was roasted highland barley flour that was mixed with plenty of butter, dry cheese, and milk tea.

The corpse was moved to the cremation site early in the morning on the seventh day, where an adobe oven had been made with a hundred adobe bricks in one of Dalaxja's fields. The round cremation chamber just accommodated his corpse. Four holes were in the lower part. The smashed sedan wood and juniper leaves served as the fuel.

Rnqaxji and Durijixji lamented. Sanjii wept sadly, because she was still unmarried. Normally, Rnqaxji and Durijixji would have joined the funeral on the main day with their husbands and children, with twelve large steamed bread buns and thin oily pancakes, tea, *kadog*, and cash, and lamented in song upon reaching the lane leading to their parents' home, while receivers lamented in song. However, this was not to be because they lived in their natal home with a 'married' identity.

Daughters and granddaughters came to mourn during their parents and grandparents' funerals. Public lamenting was a glorious thing for the deceased's family, indicating that the deceased must have had a happy life with many loving descendants.

Durijixji and Rnqaxji lamented as their father's corpse was placed in the sedan, greeted monks on their arrival, received the maternal uncles, when the corpse was put in the cremation oven, and at the time the cremation fire was lit. They lamented movingly, just as their mother, Xjirimu, had taught. The other women also lamented in such emotion that they embraced each other. Men were also touched by their moving lamentations that they surreptitiously wiped away tears.

Two men lit the fire after Dalaxja's corpse was put in the cremation chamber. Rnqaxji and Durijixji huddled with other women and lamented as their hearts broke:



On today's day,  
Daughters and granddaughters,  
At the red fire's center,  
My respected father,  
Rises high in the sky.

On this very day,  
You burn like a candle,  
Burn like burning paper,  
Burn like a flaming lamp.

On this very day,  
You are at the center of the great earth,  
Turned to gray ashes,  
We, unworthy daughters and granddaughters,  
Our gray hearts are drawn out.

From this day,  
Where shall we turn and to whom shall we talk?  
We will never see you again.

Respected father,  
You left us much too early.

Our respected father,  
When you go to the other world,  
Your left foot steps forward,  
Your right foot moves back,  
If you have the chance,  
From the Netherworld King,  
Obtain many precious incarnations,  
Your daughters and granddaughters,  
Will bear children incarnated with your spirit.

We daughters and granddaughters,  
Will embrace them to our warm bosoms,  
And treat them as our respected father.

Dalaxja's bone ash was collected and buried at the foot of a high slope, before being moved to a site chosen by the family *pram* on the next Mourning Day.

Xjirimu dreamed two days later of Dalaxja descending the mountain behind her village and then entering their home. She happily reported this, delighting her children that their father had selected his family for his next incarnation.

Later, a monk said Durijixji's daughter was the incarnation of her grandfather, Dalaxja.

SIXTY-NINE MEETS A FUTURE WIFE

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Sixty-nine, get up! Breakfast is ready. We're all waiting for you. The potatoes in the pot are getting over-cooked!" Xjirimu shouted from the upper courtyard. It was the third time she had called him.

"Yes! I'm putting on my clothes!" Sixty-nine replied sleepily, impatiently, and guiltily from his sleeping room. He leaned against the folded-up covers and looked at the sunshine streaming through the window, bathing his face in its warmth. His discomfort lessened his sense of sleepiness.

He stood on the sleeping room floor and gazed out the small window in the back wall. Tomtits and sparrows chirped and leapt about in the willows and fruit trees, which had opened buds. Sixty-nine suddenly lightened, knowing that spring had come, and the weather was warmer.

"Are you up? Duwa Cairang is here to visit you. He's waiting for you on the *pei*!" Xjirimu urged, pounding on his door.

Sixty-nine had first met Duwa Cairang at a singing party in a village at the entrance of a deep, wide valley. Inhabitants of Sixty-nine's village walked down a steep path to reach this village of about sixty households. All the villagers there spoke Mongghul, but maintained that their ancestors were Tibetan. Their women wore much silver jewelry and kept their hair in a multitude of small braids. The lower part of their garments was trimmed with a wide band of red cloth.

"You're early!" Sixty-nine greeted as he entered the kitchen, stepping up on the *pei* without washing his face.

Duwa Cairang courteously stood from the inner side of the *pei* and motioned for Sixty-nine to sit by him.

Xjirimu told her daughters to cook oily, thin pancakes of wheat flour to entertain their guest. She

regularly looked for smoke, which rose from the smoldering dung and straw-fueled fire, covering it quickly with ash using wood chips.

"I sleep late these days now that our crops have been sown," Sixty-nine said, reaching out to take a bowl of black tea from his sister, on the other side of the cooking stove.

"I've come to invite you to my home. My mother has distilled a big vat of liquor and I want to enjoy it with you. Do you have time?" Duwa Cairang asked.

"I would like to," Sixty-nine said, looking at his mother for approval. More than half a year had elapsed since his father's death. He had not attended parties during this period in keeping with the rule that he should not be drunk for forty-nine days after his father's death. Xjirimu did not disapprove and saw them off with two loaves of baked bread in a *dalen* as a customary gift.

Duwa Cairang's home was on a high slope at the end of a long, steep, narrow lane. Many small-framed houses and carved front gates clustered along the lane, forming the sides of the lane.

The home had a small courtyard. A simple, two-story building stood in the south part of the courtyard with an open front and no wood wall. Bundles of straw were piled atop the second floor for livestock feed during the long winter. The first floor was a stable. Two rooms were atop the northeast part of the house's roof. One was the family shrine, and the other was a room for a monk uncle, kept free for his rare visits from Rgulang Monastery. Another single room was above the corridor, where Duwa Cairang's father slept.

Sixty-nine stood on the roof and observed the households along the lane. They were so close together that one could easily step from one house to another along the roofs. He asked Duwa Cairang's father, clad in a white felt hat and a long, white wool robe, why the homes had been built so that they adjoined each other.

The old man replied, "Historically, we built our households like this to guard against thieves. People could easily inform each other of attack and fight together. The master of the household sleeps on the roof of the house in the

room above the corridor and easily notices if thieves come at night," and pointed to the room where he slept at night.

He proudly continued, "Once I went to bed in my room but did not, as usual, fall asleep. I heard a neighbor's dog bark. It was soon joined by other dogs barking madly. I wondered if thieves had come. I looked through my window and saw two men unfastening horses' reins from a neighbor's manger by their courtyard gate. I jumped up, stood on the roof, and shouted, 'Be quick! Thieves! Horse thieves!'

"Village men rushed out with clubs and sticks. The two thieves couldn't escape. Villagers waited for them at both ends of the lane. They were caught, taken to a lonely site outside the village, their Achilles' tendons were cut, and they were left there. This is according to our custom."

Sixty-nine, Duwa Cairang, a neighbor, and the father began drinking. Sixty-nine's throat itched after several cups of liquor from not having sung for months. Without being asked, he began singing. They drank some cups after each song was finished and chatted cheerfully and humorously.

One of Duwa Cairang's sisters cooked and entertained them throughout the drinking party, filling their tea bowls and warmly offering liquor to them all. She courteously asked Sixty-nine to drink, kneeling before him with three small wood cups of liquor on a round wood plate, in honor of his first visit to her home. Sixty-nine had never met a woman during his countless liquor parties who so warmly and genuinely invited him to drink. He drank every cup she offered.

Zhualimaxji was tall. Large eyes peered out at the world from under long eyelashes. She spoke gently and sincerely. The sweet smile on her fair-skinned face was full of joy as she regularly urged Sixty-nine to eat and drink well. From her braids and colorful long-sleeved robe, Sixty-nine guessed she was *tulighui juuligha*.

Zhualimaxji had heard of Sixty-nine, knew he was a singer, and had hoped to meet him and hear his songs. This had now come true in her own home. His songs were beautiful and melodious and she enjoyed them. She also found that he was handsome, humorous, warm, and had

profound cultural knowledge. She was so impressed and attracted that she did not want to leave his presence.

The party ended late that night. One by one they lay down after becoming drunk. Zhualimaxji helped Sixty-nine to a room where a dim rape seed oil wick flickered, a long prancing flame. Sixty-nine was drunk and unable to control himself. He reached out, drew Zhualimaxji close to him, and hungrily kissed her lips. Zhualimaxji did not resist as Sixty-nine's hands eagerly clutched her body, grasping here and there.

"No, I won't do that," Sixty-nine said stopping suddenly.

"Don't worry. My parents won't care if they learn about us, because I..." Zhualimaxji said.

"You mean you are *tulighui juuligha*?" Sixty-nine asked.

Zhualimaxji nodded.

"That's what I thought when I first saw you. Wonderful!" Sixty-nine exclaimed. He flung his robe aside, blew the light out, and moved above Zhualimaxji.

During that brief night under a sheepskin robe cover, they exerted much effort, expressed much, and learned a great deal about each other.

Zhualimaxji got up before dawn and started cooking as usual.

## EVIL FULAAN NARA

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**I**n the early morning of Mourning Day, Sixty-nine invited several village men to help move his father's bone ash to a small plot of level ground halfway up a forested mountain designated by his family *pram*. After the bone ash was buried, the men left, leaving only Sixty-nine and his mother by the new grave.

Xjirimu silently gazed at her husband's grave. Her eyes sadly sparked with tears as she thought, "Your burial site has become a new graveyard for your descendants. Don't feel lonely. I'll be here on your right in a few years."

"Mother, I'm ready now," Sixty-nine said. He piled up thirteen large steamed wheat-flour bread loaves and many fried wheat cakes near the grave. He lit straw, added juniper twigs, and *szuari*, sprinkled liquor on the ground, and burned yellow paper after patting his mother and his own head and upper body with the paper. They tossed pieces of the bread on the grave mound, knelt before the grave, and made three prostrations.

They finished, put the baskets on their backs, and walked down toward their home. On the way, Xjirimu said, "We must walk quickly! I'm afraid matchmakers will visit us and bring Sanjii's betrothal gifts. Today is the day matchmakers are likely to visit the girl's side. We have many things to discuss if they do come. The boy's side wanted to hold the wedding last year, but we refused because we were mourning your father's death. They will urge us to hold the wedding this year. What do you suggest?" Xjirimu asked.

"She should go live in her husband's home if they ask and after all their promised betrothal gifts are given. Sanjii is old enough. It makes no sense for her to stay at home now that my two elder sisters both stay at home. Gossip will grow if Sanjii doesn't marry and go live with her husband. The boy's home village is a good one and their neighbors are

from our former village. In case Sanjii is mistreated at her husband's home, she can go to a clan member's home. They will help her," Sixty-nine continued.

Xjirimu agreed. When they got home, they found that Sixty-nine's sisters had made *halighii*<sup>59</sup> and were waiting for them.

Xjirimu uneasily went back and forth through the courtyard gate, hoping to see men coming down their lane. A bit later, she stood on the house roof and gazed into the distance, hoping to see mounted men entering the valley. To her disappointment, she only saw a few young women coming and going, visiting their parents' homes on this special day with their children. No one visited them that day.

Xjirimu met a fellow villager some days later in a lane who had connection with the prospective groom's family. This woman disclosed that the boy's side had given up on the marriage plan because the boy's zodiac year did not match Sanjii's. Xjirimu knew this was only a pretext and guessed someone must have told the boy's family something negative about Sanjii or her family.

The village woman said, when pressed for more information, "I learned that the real reason is that they dislike this region, even though they consider Sanjii suitable. You know we live in Fulaan Nara, which they think is full of evils that would harm their son and their home. A dreadful incident that happened in their village probably created this idea. A villager with a wife from Fulaan Nara was on his way home after visiting his wife's parents' home. He fell and

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<sup>59</sup> *Halighii* is cooked during festivals and when important guests visit. Many thin pancakes are fried. Highland barley flour and tawny daylily powder are slowly sprinkled into a boiling pot and stirred with a thin rolling pin until it is thick and well cooked. The pancakes are rolled, and the mush is put inside with one or two spoons of steaming, ground garlic. Each rolled-up pancake is cut in half. This delicacy is often squeezed too tightly the first time it is eaten, and the mush dribbles from one end. It is rarely cooked because it requires so much time. A shortage of wheat flour was historically another restriction.



his head struck the ground as he stepped down a slight slope. He died. It was soon learned from his *pram* that this was because he had enraged some *duduna*<sup>60</sup> in his in-laws' home by taking a pair of horse stirrups from his father-in-law. The *duduna* followed him and waited for a chance to kill him. That's why he died so easily. His family then drove his wife out of their home."

"Nonsense! We're not from Fulaan Nara. We moved here from Haliqi. We're the same as they are; we still belong to Haliqi. All our villagers moved here from Haliqi," Xjirimu said.

"Yes, that's true. You and I were born in Haliqi and we speak the Haliqi dialect and dress in the Haliqi style. But we live in Fulaan Nara," the village woman said.

Xjirimu angrily strode back to her home. Her daughters were embroidering in a sunny spot in the upper courtyard.

"Mother, why are you angry?" Durijixji asked.

"Shgeayili Village will not send matchmakers because they say evils exist in Fulaan Nara. It's really unimaginable!" Xjirimu said.

"What's wrong with Fulaan Nara?" Rnqaxji and Durijixji asked in surprise.

Xjirimu said, "I heard that there were many fearful evils in Fulaan Nara when I lived in our old home. It's true that Haliqi people denigrate Fulaan Nara people. They believe villages here have *modaya* and *duduna* and avoid contacting Fulaan Nara. Inter-marriage is rare. Haliqi people say Fulaan Nara women can't cook well, sew poorly, are dirty, dress poorly, that their homes are untidy, and even that the women shamelessly walk barefoot to song gatherings."<sup>61</sup>

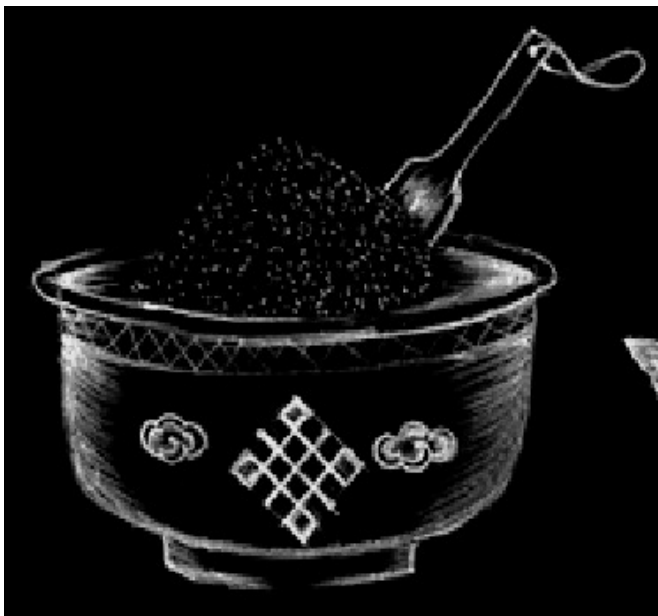
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<sup>60</sup> These selfish evil spirits are loyal to their masters and take things to their masters' homes. *Duduna* have thirty-two manifestations. They are terrified if they see monkeys and dare not visit or take something from families who have monkeys (although there is no memory of any Mongghul family every having a monkey).

<sup>61</sup> In order to prevent their newly embroidered, colorful shoes from getting dirty on rainy days, women from Fulaan

"It's true. Once I overheard two Haliqi men telling each other that when they look over to the Fulaan Nara side from the Dongyuan Mountains, they have a sense of bad luck when they see this dreadful land," Rnqaxji said.

That night, Sanjii had a little barley noodle soup and went to bed early. Many thoughts went through her mind. Between this failed match and the marriage that had been canceled due to the groom's body odor, she feared that she might never marry. Later, she refused all marriage offers and refused to see matchmakers, despite her family and relatives' persuasion. Finally, her family held *tulighui juuligha* for her too, just as they had for her elder sisters.



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Nara often removed their shoes and carried them on their shoulders.

## SIXTY-NINE PROPOSES

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Sixty-nine recalled the night he spent with Zhualimaxji over and over again, distracting him from his daily work. He often walked to a mountain top behind Duwa Village from where he could see Zhualimaxji's home, though it was but a distant blur. Once, when he saw a woman's figure on the house roof, he thought it might be Zhualimaxji and gazed until she vanished. It was hard for him to sleep at night as he recalled Zhualimaxji's melodious voice and lovely expression. He felt he could not live without her.

He decided to visit her one dark night and walked along the sloping path directly to her home. Not daring to push open her front gate, he squatted by a pile of straw at her courtyard wall and waited, hoping she would come to get straw to feed her livestock. He was disappointed that she did not come and left before dawn.

He went again the following night and gently pushed the courtyard gate. It was bolted from inside. He was afraid the family dog would bark if he tossed clods on the roof of her room. He considered climbing the courtyard wall and stepping down to her room by a ladder, but the wall was too high to climb over. He knew he should be careful. Her father would take him for a thief if he noticed his entry and the villagers would probably beat him.

He was again disappointed and left at midnight.

The third night he loudly sang some distance from her village:

Two oxen plowing a field,  
 The oxen are whipped.  
 I cannot see my lover,  
 My heart hurts as though stabbed by a knife.

Zhualimaxji heard and guessed it was Sixty-nine, hinting that he would visit. A few minutes later, she thought he had probably arrived and quietly went outside and found Sixty-nine squatting near the straw pile. They tightly embraced and crept into her chamber where under the glow of an oil lamp, Zhualimaxji removed her clothes and lay down, without covering herself. Her long braids fell across her generous breasts, slim waist, and slender legs. Her fine, smooth skin was especially mesmerizing.

Sixty-nine lightly put the braids above her head as his right hand caressed her belly. Zhualimaxji slowly moved her legs apart, waiting for Sixty-nine's next move. She blew out the lamp, while Sixty-nine moved above her. Their strong, excited movements made the loose planks on the *bankang* groan rhythmically, until they were exhausted.

"You're so wonderful! I was so excited. I completely enjoyed it!" Zhualimaxji exulted, wiping sweat from Sixty-nine's forehead.

"Thank you! That's what I wanted. Me too," Sixty-nine replied delightedly, putting her head on his lap, lightly stroking her thighs.

"Are you willing to be my wife forever? I want to marry you and live together," Sixty-nine said pure-heartedly.

"It's impossible, though my desire is the same as yours," Zhualimaxji replied, despair showing on her face.

"Why?" Sixty-nine asked, kissing the tip of her nose, eyes, and forehead.

"You are a wonderful man. Local girls know you are a great singer and would willingly become your woman if you asked. I would love to be your woman, but I am not your equal, for I have already had *tulighui juuligha*. You know such women are denigrated and have a low social position, compared to women with their own husbands. I have a two-year-old daughter. Besides, you are your family's only son and it's time for you to marry. Your relatives will oppose a woman like me entering your home as a daughter-in-law. My mother died from a serious disease when I was only two. I was raised by my grandmother," Zhualimaxji said sadly.

Sixty-nine stroked her face and said, "I don't care if you are *tulighui juuligha*. I don't care what my family says. You didn't have your mother's love at an early age, which makes me want to love you more."

Zhualimaxji kissed Sixty-nine's belly and said, "Thank you. I understand you, but these matters are hard to work out. What's more, your three sisters stay at your home, like me. There would be many disputes if I lived with them. I would have little freedom and few rights. Women like me have many quarrels and complicated relationships with their mothers-in-law and their daughters."

"Yes, but anyway, you are my ideal woman," Sixty-nine said, licking away her tears.

Outside, cocks crowed the third time, raising their heads, stretching their glistening, feathered necks.

"We needn't talk more. It's late," Zhualimaxji said. She stood, dressed, left, and soon returned with a cup of black tea and several boiled eggs and pancakes for Sixty-nine.

Before dawn, Zhualimaxji reluctantly escorted him outside the courtyard gate and said goodbye.

## LOVE SONGS IN THE MOUNTAINS

The Festival of the Fifth Month fell on a fine, cloudless day when mountains and plains were clad with green grass and jubilant flowers. Verdant willows along the village lanes cast cool shades for villagers, who enjoyed their protection on hot days. Flourishing crops in the fields had grown thigh-high and were about to tassel. Patches of purple bunne flowers intertwined with yellow rape flowers brightened the steep farmed slopes. Sheep, goats, cattle, and horses grazed on fallow land.

Groups of children automatically organized themselves and cheerfully picnicked on patches of lush grass near their villages. Some children enjoyed playing 'visiting relatives'.<sup>62</sup> They loved spending a few nights inside holes that they dug and dubbed 'homes'. Occasionally, big boys went to defy neighbor village boys and fought, tossing stones at each other with slings. They enjoyed the festival endlessly, because it was the only time they had a picnic the whole year.

Young women passed each other on paths, visiting their parents' homes dressed in beautiful clothes, preceded by older children. They carried younger children on their backs and held babies in their arms. Old women sat together in

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<sup>62</sup> Children under the age of ten play this game. Clods are put in lines to make a square, which is regarded as a household. The square is further divided into the sleeping rooms, *pei* room, courtyard, corridor, and so on. Children divide into two families. Each represents a certain family member, for example, father, mother, brother, or sister. They visit, greet, and entertain each other with small pieces of clods symbolizing food, imitating what adults do.

grassy, sunny places sewing, joking, and laughing, while men enjoyed themselves drinking liquor.

Sixty-nine put on his white felt triangular hat, a pair of big-lensed, dark glasses with large, perfectly round lens, a shirt with an embroidered collar, an embroidered sash, a pair of wide trousers, and patterned cloth shoes. He mounted his horse and rode to a mountain forest, where he had arranged to meet Zhualimaxji. They selected a shielded level spot and boiled tea in a pot atop three stones.

They drank tea and ate cold noodles, potato starch, and fried leek-stuffed bread. They poured out their hearts to each other. Sixty-nine enjoyed the liquor he had brought. When he offered Zhualimaxji some, she shyly refused.

"Why? I don't believe you don't drink. All women taste liquor when they make it," Sixty-nine said.

"I'm afraid I must be..." Zhualimaxji stammered.

"You mean you are pregnant?" Sixty-nine said.

"Probably. My body hasn't bled for two months and I have some morning sickness," Zhualimaxji said.

Sixty-nine pulled Zhualimaxji close and gently touched her belly.

"Is it mine?" he asked.

"Of course! You are a great seeder," Zhualimaxji said and smiled.

"It's mainly because your own fertile soil is so easy to seed," Sixty-nine said and then they laughed and tightly embraced.

"Will you allow it to call you father or uncle?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"Of course! Father!" Sixty-nine replied.

Zhualimaxji smiled and said, "It's so wonderful to be with you in this mountain forest on the Festival of the Fifth Month," raising her head and gazing at Sixty-nine blissfully.

"Yes, I'm feeling romantic, too," Sixty-nine said.

"May I sing?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"Sure! I love your songs!" Sixty-nine said.

Zhualimaxji started singing, her right hand touching the right side of her face near her ear to help her sing better:

Up to the top of a high slope,

Looking down on the verdant plain,  
Gray water flows,  
A gray dragon flutters,  
A shepherd brandishes,  
His long leather whip at his lover.

To have a horse but no saddle,  
To have a lover but no love,  
To have a bit but no rein,  
To have a heart but no time,  
To have a lover but worry he will vanish.

Sixty-nine replied:

The pigeon flew away but the eagle did not,  
The bell tinkled when the eagle flew away.  
Her body returned, but her heart did not,  
How much I would love her if her heart returned to me.

Zhualimaxji replied:

Apples from the plains,  
Look and taste good,  
My lover was just as good.  
My lover's nose is as nice as a mountain pass,  
Eyes bright as Venus,  
Strong as a lion,  
How can my heart forget him?

Sixty-nine sang:

My lover's Venus-bright eyes,  
Her face is apple-red,  
Her flesh as soft as cotton,  
Her heart as pure as spring water,  
I adore her eternally.

These vivid songs gracefully and sorrowfully echoed among the mountains. Only songs express and allow our pent-up feelings expression – those feelings so long



imprisoned in the bottoms of our hearts. Only singing allows us to forget our mental, physical, and spiritual burdens.

They sipped tea quietly for some time.

"Why have you nothing to say now?" Zhualimaxji said.

"I'm imagining how our ancestors created those songs so perfectly," Sixty-nine replied.

"Yes. To come to our world and sing with one's beloved is the happiest, most beautiful thing in one's life," Zhualimaxji said.

"I agree. To be with one's lover and express true feelings in song is the highlight of life," Sixty-nine said.

Zhualimaxji said, "How regrettable to have no one to love in your life. People come to the world needing love."

Zhualimaxji's colorful and exquisite headdress seemed as beautiful as a peacock's comb in the late afternoon sunlight, framing her pretty face. Two long silver earrings dangled from her ears, and a string of coral and agate hung from her neck. Red, yellow, green, blue, and purple strips of cloth edged her long sleeves. An embroidered sash of complex patterns embraced her. A pair of wide pants, the knees inlaid with narrow white cloth, covered her legs. Embroidered and tassel-tipped shoes completed this pretty-as-a-peacock woman.

"Am I pretty?" Zhualimaxji asked, as Sixty-nine held her long braids.

"Utterly!" Sixty-nine answered.

"I am like Qiminsuu,<sup>63</sup> and you are Larinbog," Zhualimaxji said.

"Yes! Larinbog and Qiminsuu herded livestock on the mountain," Sixty-nine said.

"Where is the mountain where they herded?" Zhualimaxji asked.

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<sup>63</sup> Larinbog is a poor shepherd who falls in love with the wealthy Qiminsuu, whose family disapproves. Ultimately, Larinbog dies and, as he is being cremated, Qiminsuu jumps into the cremation fire.

"No one knows. They were Mongghul, so I don't think it's far from here. Probably it was on this mountain," Sixty-nine said.

They both laughed.

"Probably. It's hard to say," said Zhualimaxji, stroking his face.

"Shall we sing their song?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"Sure! You please sing Qiminsuu's part first," Sixty-nine said.

Zhualimaxji sang:

Larinbog, brother from the valley,  
Qiminsuu, sister from the plain,  
Drive hundreds of mares to mix with hundreds of colts,  
Drive hundreds of cows to mix with hundreds of calves,  
Drive hundreds of ewes to mix with hundreds of lambs.

Sixty-nine sang:

Qiminsuu, sister from the plain,  
Larinbog, brother from the valley,  
Drive hundreds of mares to mix with hundreds of colts,  
Drive hundreds of cows to mix with hundreds of calves,  
Drive hundreds of ewes to mix with hundreds of lambs.

The two sang together:

We climb up to the shady side of the mountain and gather  
lily bulbs,  
Climb up on the sunny side of the mountain and break off  
green juniper limbs,  
Climb further up the mountain and burn an offering of  
incense,  
Prostrate to Great Heaven after sprinkling water on the  
sacrificial fire,  
Pray to the mountain deities after beseeching Great  
Heaven,  
We descend to the verdant plain and pitch our white tent,  
Put a clay pot atop three stones,

Pour red tea in the red pot after adding well water,  
Sprinkle it to Great Heaven after adding white milk,  
We two meet when white milk is offered to the mountain  
deities.

Zhualimaxji sang:

Larinbog, brother from the valley, and Qiminsuu, sister  
from the plain,

Larinbog, brother from the valley, and Qiminsuu, sister  
from the plain.

"I dare not sing the following words. They're too  
cruel. I feel sad to continue," Zhualimaxji said.

"Just sing what you want," Sixty-nine said.

Zhualimaxji sang:

I cannot leave you, what should I do?

I offer you my golden pins.

I offer you my silver headdress pin.

I offer you my silver earrings.

I offer you my silver bracelets.

I offer you my gold rings.

I offer you my horse-mounting robe.

I offer you my embroidered sash.

I offer you my pink skirts.

I offer you my sewn shoes.

I offer you my body.

When Zhualimaxji finished singing, she put her head  
on Sixty-nine's bosom. The tragic story they had sung made  
her feel sad, and tears flowed down her hot face.

"Are you really going to give all of you to me?"  
Sixty-nine asked.

Zhualimaxji remained quiet as Sixty-nine gently  
nuzzled her tears away.

## XJIRIMU IS UNHAPPY WITH ZHUALIMAXJI

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**M**other!" Sanjii called loudly in surprise, as she ran to the *pei* room, waving something in her hand.

"What happened?" Xjirimu asked impatiently, as she watched Rnqaxji's son drawing pictures in ash with a stick.

"I found something important in Elder Brother's room. Just look," Sanjii said and handed it to her mother.

"Oh, a pocket-cover!" Xjirimu said, examining it carefully as she took Rnqaxji's son from her lap and put him on the ground.

"Duwa Cairang's elder sister surely gave it to him. He has been seeing her for a long time and frequently visits her home at night. What do you think of this needlework? I think it's poorly done."

Having heard Sanjii's expression of surprise, Rnqaxji and Durijixji put their baskets down at the pigsty where they had been scattering dry soil on the floor of the dirty sty and joined them.

"Her skill lags far behind all of you. She should have a line with red thread here, but she did it with blue. The sewn lines are of different thickness and they are crooked. See, here there ought to be a peony design, because peonies signify happiness and safety for a man, but she made a chrysanthemum. Her sewing skill is not nearly as good as yours," Xjirimu commented to her daughters.

The three daughters examined it carefully and agreed.

"Have you seen the steamed barley bread our brother brings from her home? It is undercooked, and she uses too many husks. It's too sour," Durijixji said, shaking her head in disapproval.

"What a woman! She doesn't even know how to make barley bread!" Rnqaxji exclaimed.

"This woman's mother died when she was only two. Her grandmother raised her. Nine-tenths of women raised by their grandmothers neither embroider nor cook well," Xjirimu said.

"I heard she stayed at home as *tulighui juuligha* and has a daughter," Sanjii said.

"I don't like it that Sixty-nine comes and goes with her. He is our only son. We want him to have a wife brought into our home through a normal wedding process. We don't want him to marry that woman and besmirch our family's reputation. Let's try to stop him visiting her home after supper. It's not safe for him to walk outside late at night. I heard Sixty-nine sat with her and sang love songs on a mountain during the Festival of the Fifth Month," Rnqaxji said.

"Such gossip has already circulated here. Villagers say Sixty-nine is half a man because he spends so much time in her home," Durijixji said, putting a handful of straw into the kitchen stove and blowing it into a flame.

Xjirimu angrily said, "We've talked enough. Please cook and eat for yourself. My son has already made me angry," and then she went to bed early.

## SIXTY-NINE MARRIES ZHUALIMAXJI

One night after supper, Sixty-nine shaved, made his face shiny with lard, put on a heavy, narrow-collared sheepskin robe, and put a ball of white, sheep-wool yarn in his robe pouch. He would visit Zhualimaxji for the first time after their daughter's birth. Her family had forbidden anyone to enter their gate for a month. It was now the second day after the baby's name-giving celebration had been held and outsiders could now visit.

Sixty-nine felt happy at the thought of seeing his baby daughter and her mother. "What does the baby look like, and who might she resemble? Will she look like me? Zhualimaxji will like the ball of yarn I spun to weave a wool robe for the baby. What name did her great grandmother give?" Sixty-nine wondered.

"Where are you going?" came an angry shout as he walked to the doorway.

He turned and found his mother standing in the courtyard. "I'm going out," Sixty-nine replied, somehow embarrassed.

"Don't lie. You're going to Duwa Village to visit that woman. I won't allow you to have further contact with her. You're an adult and should understand. Are you a son of our family? I order you to not contact her further," she said, bolting the front gate.

Sixty-nine quickly walked into his room without response and bolted his door. He lay on his back, his hands clamped behind his neck.

"Open the door! I want to talk to you!" his mother said, pushing the door.

Sixty-nine did not open the door and told her not to come in. He was afraid of being enraged. After a long while, when he was sure his mother had gone to bed, he opened his door and walked directly to Duwa Village.

He wearily walked into his home early the next morning as Xjirimu was offering regular morning incense in a small triangular opening atop the small square garden wall, facing the main rooms at the courtyard center. She piously chanted scriptures inaudibly. She saw him while performing the last of three prostrations. He went to the *pei* room where his sisters were quietly eating boiled potatoes and bread. Durijixji called her mother to come eat, but she did not respond. She told Sixty-nine, "You have made Mother angry. She didn't eat last night. Now she won't have breakfast."

Sixty-nine said nothing.

After eating several potatoes, he walked into his mother's bedroom and found her lying on her covers, weeping.

"Mother, why are you weeping?" Sixty-nine asked, sitting on the edge of the bed.

"Why do I cry? My son won't listen to me," she said and sobbed anew.

"I do obey you," he said.

"Then why did you go to that woman's home last night? I'm getting old. Your father left early. I can't control you any longer. You often leave home and go outside at night. The woman you visit is neither good at needlework nor a good cook. How could she live with us?" Xjirimu said.

"She does everything well and is kindhearted," Sixty-nine replied.

Durijixji came in and put some potatoes, bread, and tea beside her mother and asked her to eat breakfast.

"You know she is *tulighui juuligha* and already has a daughter!" said Xjirimu.

"Is that a problem? Aren't my sisters the same?" Sixty-nine sharply retorted.

Durijixji's face turned red and she dashed out of the room.

"How dare you compare her to your sisters! Do you dislike your sisters? Drive them away from our home! You are the son and master of the home," Xjirimu said angrily and sat up.

"I don't mean that," he said gently.

"I will not concern myself with your marriage. Do as you like," Xjirimu said.

"No, Mother, I need your concern. I'm arranging my marriage now," Sixty-nine said.

"If you want me to care about your marriage, I'll send matchmakers soon. Rnqanhua is your father's sister's youngest daughter. She is two years younger than you and skilled at sewing and cooking. You saw her during the last Spring Festival when she visited. She's pretty, strong, tall, and must be a good farm worker. We are relatives and know each other very well, which means we will pay less in betrothal gifts. They don't have *hanqi shduri*. Her parents have promised to betroth her to you. They say we can have the wedding whenever we want," Xjirimu said.

Sixty-nine shook his head from side to side.

Xjirimu, the carpenter-uncle, his relatives, and village elders tried to persuade Sixty-nine to marry several girls in the following two years, but he insisted on marrying Zhualimaxji. He soon passed marriageable age and Xjirimu had to agree unwillingly after her *pram* and a fortune-teller deduced that his future wife's home was located south of their home.

Zhualimaxji arrived at his home with a group of escorts sent by her family on the morning of his wedding day. She held one daughter on her horse, while another was mounted behind her.



## A LUSTFUL MAN

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**Z**hualimaxji and her two daughters, Rnqaxji's two sons, and Durijixji's daughter meant that Xjirimu's family had now become a large household. Xjirimu had much responsibility tending five children when the other adults were working in the fields.

Early in the year, Zhualimaxji visited her father's home with her two daughters during every festival, regardless of what work the family was busy with, because she was still in the first year of her marriage, as was the case for other newly married women. Zhualimaxji enjoyed preferential treatment from Xjirimu, not only in being assigned less work but in being allowed to visit her father's home. The lesser amount of work at home and in the fields was done so she would not soil her beautiful new clothes.

This changed in the second year. Zhualimaxji started doing hard housework and farm tasks. She wanted to be a good wife and daughter-in-law, as did most women who lived in their mother-in-law's homes. As time passed, however, Zhualimaxji found far more inequities than she had anticipated. Xjirimu urged her daughters to sit with her on the *pei* and eat while Zhualimaxji's place was by the stove. Every morning when Zhualimaxji got up and began work, the three daughters lazily slept. She confided this to her husband, who agreed that it was hateful and unfair, but he said he dared not say anything in fear of enraging his mother.

One night after they had gone to bed, Zhualimaxji complained to Sixty-nine, "Your sisters are impossible. Every night at least one man visits. Sometimes, two or three come in turn in one night. Some nights, several come together. The front gate makes so much noise opening and closing, that I can hardly sleep. Can you do something?"

"You're right. I hate it, too. But I'm their brother, so what can I say? I'm helpless. There isn't anything we can do.

Who knows why they did not want to marry and instead chose to stay home like this," Sixty-nine said helplessly.

"The worst is that they wrestle and squeal the whole night in their beds, as though it was not a home but a love song meeting," Zhualimaxji said.

Suddenly, "Bang!" a man pushed into their sleeping room, interrupting their chat. Sixty-nine shouted, "Who are you?" The drunken man realized he was in the wrong room, turned, and left as quickly as possible. The door remained open behind him.

"What are you doing? Why did you barge into my brother's room? How shameless! Come here quickly," came scolding from the courtyard.

"Look! I'd have been killed if you had not been here," Zhualimaxji wailed, embracing her husband tightly.

"I know my sisters' actions are excessive! They should control themselves but, as their brother, what can I do?" Sixty-nine sighed.

"It's the mother's responsibility to control her daughters' excessive behavior. Only a mother can do this. But your mother never does. She seems to feel this is normal behavior. Our neighbors rumor that our home is so noisy every night that they can't sleep. Many women stay in their parents' homes like your sisters, but there are only a few cases like ours, with three daughters living at home as *tulighui juuligha*," Zhualimaxji said.

Sixty-nine remained silent.

"Hey! Hey! Are you listening?" Zhualimaxji pushed his shoulder, but he did not respond. He was deeply asleep.

Zhualimaxji couldn't sleep. She heard muffled groans, and the crudely made bed planks creaked and groaned. Doors rhythmically opened and closed with squeaks and 'clap-clap' sounds as people went to and from the courtyard to relieve themselves. Zhualimaxji tossed about in bed until the third cock crow sounded, when the drunken man left finally.

Zhualimaxji rose as usual the next morning. As she went out the front gate to get cabbage from her garden plot to cook with potatoes for breakfast, she found a neighbor driving the pigs away from her own garden. The pigs fled in

all directions with full stomachs. When she saw Zhualimaxji, she furiously scolded, "Can't your family take care of your own pigs? Look at my garden! My vegetables have been destroyed – eaten by your swine! What will my family eat? Can we come eat from your pot?" She pointed her index finger at Zhualimaxji and continued scolding. Greatly embarrassed, Zhualimaxji apologized profusely. She was sure the drunken man had carelessly left the courtyard gate ajar when he left.

Durijixji and Rnqaxji noticed what had happened and hastily came to help shut the pigs up in their sties. "Please inform your sex-hungry visitors to be sure the gate is closed!" Zhualimaxji shouted at Durijixji and her sister, as tears flowed from her face.

Durijixji blushed, but said nothing, only stared angrily at Zhualimaxji, who dolefully entered her sleeping room thinking that her mother-in-law should be instructing her daughters after their neighbor had suffered such a disaster. She waited, but there was no scolding, instead came the sounds of eating and laughing. She was not even called to come eat breakfast.

ZHUALIMAXJI RETURNS HOME

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**Z**hualimaxji and the three daughters went to weed a rape field several days later while Xjirimu tended the children at home. The three daughters weeded some distance from Zhualimaxji, who overheard them discussing who was good and kindhearted to them, who regularly brought certain good food and gifts, who came to visit just out of lust, lacking any heartfelt love, and so on.

"If it rains, I'm sure they'll visit tonight," Sanjii said looking at the sky, which had a dense mass of black clouds rolling in from the west.

"It will rain. Look at the dark clouds. It's become cool. Flocks of swallows are hovering low in the sky, and a swarm of ants are madly pulling and pushing food into their holes. A heavy rain will fall soon. We should return home now. If it rains suddenly, we won't be able to return," Rnqaxji said.

Then the three picked up their empty baskets and left straight from the field without even a glance at Zhualimaxji, who continued weeding. She felt uncomfortable and hated them for using the rain as an excuse to leave early. In fact, they were impatient for the coming night's recreation.

Thick black clouds hid the sky soon after they left. In the blink of an eye it started raining, accompanied by thunder and lightning. Zhualimaxji quickly put the weeds she had pulled to feed the pigs in her basket and ran toward home. The pouring water wet her clothes. She dared not take shelter under big trees, worrying that lightning might strike her, so she squatted in the shelter of a boulder.

When the rain lessened, she walked down the steep, slippery path, shivering in her wet, cold clothes. It was dark when she got home. She was hungry, tired, and cold. As she listlessly walked into the kitchen, she found the others had already eaten. Only a little cooled highland barley noodle

soup remained at the bottom of the big pot. She had to eat. Her stomach was empty. She wanted some bread, but found none. She had cooked a big batch of bread two days earlier. When she asked where the bread was, her sisters-in-law replied it had already been eaten. She then hopelessly went to her room and slept.

Later that night she was awakened by loud talk, giggles, and singing. She felt this was strange, put on her clothes, tiptoed to the noisy room, and peeked in through a window. Three young men were with the three daughters, eating the chicken and bread she had cooked, and drinking liquor. What a wonderful time they were having, hand in hand and with their legs crossed under a cover!

Infuriated, Zhualimaxji kicked a wood water-carrying bucket next to the door. "Clang! Clang!" the bucket rolled into the courtyard.

Their gay sounds suddenly ceased. Sanjii came out and found Zhualimaxji in the courtyard by the bucket. She shouted, "What's wrong with the bucket? Does it want food to eat and water to drink from you?"

"That's right. It's so hungry that I cannot sleep every night! Is our home a place for love song festivals?" Zhualimaxji yelled back, walked inside, and slammed the door behind her.

"Let's see if you dare come spying again!" Sanjii shouted and fiercely kicked the bucket.

Next day when she entered the kitchen, Zhualimaxji found her mother-in-law eating chicken on the *pei*. When Xjirimu noticed her, she immediately hid the meat under her long garment.

"Mother, what are you eating?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"What could I be eating except bread?" Xjirimu answered, embarrassed.

"Was not the bread all eaten yesterday? That's what I was told last night when I asked for some bread," Zhualimaxji said.

Xjirimu was more embarrassed and shouted, "Do you know who you are? Are you sure you are a daughter-in-law? You have no right to scold me – your mother-in-law! I'll eat what I want!"

"Oh! Strange! You can eat bread and chicken. Am I a member of your family? Are you all treating me as a human being? You are a mother! Why do you never complain about your daughters' nightly noise? They are so excessive!" Zhualimaxji bellowed, unable to control herself.

"The chicken meat is not ours. A visitor brought it! It is my daughters' business! It's natural. You did the same before you married my son!" Xjirimu said.

"That's a lie. That chicken is ours. I counted the chickens. Where is that big red chicken? Didn't you smell burning feathers coming from the stove? Your daughters are just like uncontrollable wild horses!" Zhualimaxji said.

"Shut your ass-hole mouth! Here you are! Have some now!" Xjirimu said, tossing a piece of chicken at Zhualimaxji, which struck her hat, making it fall off her head. Xjirimu was enraged and jumped up and down in the kitchen, scolding Zhualimaxji furiously, pointing her index finger at her forehead. At that moment, the three daughters rushed in. Sanjii pulled Zhualimaxji away from her mother by her braids. Rnqaxji spat on her face.

Zhualimaxji cried, got away from them, and ran out the front gate. She looked for her husband in the lanes, hoping for his help. She found him sitting with some men in a sunny place where they were chatting, joking, and spinning sheep wool.

"Danjansuu's father! Please come home now!" she called.

"What's wrong? I'll come later!" Sixty-nine shouted back, his face and tone showing that he was humiliated by her calling him in public, particularly when he was with other young men.

"No! Immediately!" she shouted.

All the men beside Sixty-nine turned, gazed at her, and laughed. One man joked, "Go quickly, your granny urgently needs her wood pole. It's time to get the fire ready in the kitchen stove!" All the men guffawed, watching Sixty-nine and his wife.

It was highly unusual for a wife to call her husband to return home when he was with other young men.

"I'll be there!" Sixty-nine shouted unhappily.

Zhualimaxji left despondently and waited in her room. When he did not return, she went into the courtyard and found Danjansuu playing with dirty water in the pig trough with the other children. She put her on her back, walked out the courtyard, and out of the village toward her father's village, bypassing the young men in the lane.

When Sixty-nine finally came home he looked for Zhualimaxji and then asked his mother, "Where is Zhualimaxji? Why did she call me back home?"

"I don't know where she's gone. She had Danjansuu on her back and walked out of the courtyard gate," Xjirimu replied, her eyes averting his gaze.

From her abnormal facial expression, Sixty-nine knew they had argued. "Did you quarrel?" Sixty-nine asked.

"Yes, I was forced to. She dared blame me for eating bread! She was so rude!" Xjirimu said angrily. "You should discipline your wife in the future!"

Sixty-nine walked into his room and smoked. He knew his sisters' behavior was excessive and his mother did not reprimand them. He felt utterly helpless – a man against his mother and sisters, and the recipient of his wife's anger.

Zhualimaxji reached her father's home with a long face. She had no gifts of bread. Zhualimaxji's grandmother, Sishijinsuu, greeted her from the upper courtyard where she held a string of prayer beads in her right hand. She asked why she wept and gestured for Zhualimaxji to sit by her. She put Danjansuu on her lap.

"What's wrong with you? Are you angry with your family? Who made you angry? Why?" Sishijinsuu asked.

"It's those three daughters and my mother-in-law!" Zhualimaxji replied, sobbing. She told Sishijinsuu everything and said that she no longer wanted to return to her mother-in-law's home.

"I understand. It's your mother-in-law and her three daughters' fault. It is an unusual family – three daughters who live at home. I knew this before you entered their home. What should we do now?" Sishijinsuu said.

Her sister-in-law brought a kettle of tea, poured a bowl for Zhualimaxji, and put roasted highland barley flour in a small wood box near them. Sishijinsuu took out a small

chunk of rancid yak butter from a chest, cut off some small pieces, and added it to their bowls. She asked Zhualimaxji to help herself then concentrated on helping Danjansuu drink some tea.

"Don't consider returning to your husband's home if you expect anything better. Mothers-in-law are sovereign, absolutely dominating their daughters-in-law, arranging house and field work, the date they can visit their parents' homes, cooking, sewing, and so on. Most daughters-in-law have no freedom after they marry and move into their husbands' homes until their mothers-in-law become very old, which takes at least ten years," Sishijinsuu said.

Zhualimaxji sat on the ground, her back against the adobe wall. Her hands covered her tear-covered face as she continued sobbing.

"To become a married woman is miserable. A woman's life is harder than a man's, particularly in her mother-in-law's home. My status was like yours for several years after I married and moved into this home. I fled several times to my parents' home, but I had to return and live here," Sishijinsuu said, comforting Zhualimaxji.

"I cannot live there!" Zhualimaxji said, bursting into tears again.

"Don't think too much. Stay with me for some days and work on your sewing," Sishijinsuu said, combing Danjansuu's long scraggy hair that covered her neck. Many tangles in her hair were not easily removed. Her body was covered in a soiled, coarse wool garment with a wool sash knotted at her back.

Zhualimaxji's grandmother wiped Danjansuu's eyes and mouth and the snot from her dirty face with her robe sleeve. Noticing that Danjansuu was squirming, she lifted Danjansuu's robe and found her hips were swollen from many, embedded nettles. The flesh was beginning to fester. She removed the thorns one by one with a sewing needle.

"Did your mother-in-law not take care of her?" Sishijinsuu asked.

"On the whole, she treated all the grandchildren equally. She had a bit of a preference for Danjansuu. I guess she thought she was her son's daughter, even though she was

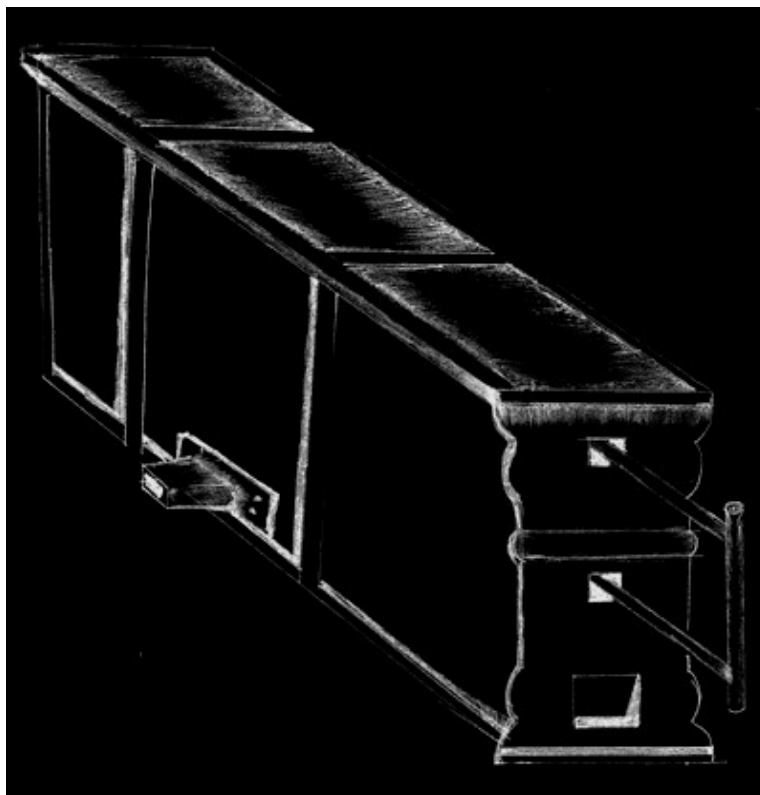


born here in our home. She is very kind to all her grandchildren and is busy looking after them. She puts them outside and lets them play freely. I guess that's why Danjansuu was pricked by thorns," Zhualimaxji said.

"What about Nayansuu?"<sup>64</sup> Sishijinsuu said.

"She's not as healthy as Danjansuu. She often gets colds, her legs swell, and her eyelids are swollen in the morning when she wakes up. I'm not sure why. Maybe her swelling is related to moved soil at their graveyard," Zhualimaxji said.

"Maybe soil was moved around the house," Sishijinsuu said.



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<sup>64</sup> Nayansuu was Zhualimaxji's first daughter.

## ZHUALIMAXJI RETURNS

Sixty-nine exchanged few words with his family after Zhualimaxji fled. He got up late and returned very late from the lanes, where young men gathered after supper, or he joined parties where they sang, listened to folktales, joked, and drank. He no longer ate with his family.

Half a month after his wife had fled, Xjirimu asked him to visit her and ask her to return, but he refused. A few days later, Xjirimu invited an elder from Yomajaa Village to visit Duwa Village to persuade Zhualimaxji to return. The old man took gifts of bread in a *dalen* and returned some hours later without success, though Zhualimaxji's grandmother and father had agreed.

The crops ripened, and it was time to start harvesting. Xjirimu and her daughters worried about the heavy harvest work. They had many fields and harvesting quickly was critical, like stealing gold from a dragon's mouth. If the harvest was not done on time, the crops could be destroyed by hailstorms, which were common at this season of the year. Override grain easily shattered and fell to the ground.

Xjirimu worried that if Zhualimaxji did not return soon, their harvest would suffer and urged, "Please go ask your wife to return. It's harvest time. Some families have already begun. The barley is down<sup>65</sup> in the fields. We can't finish harvesting without her."

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<sup>65</sup> A bumper harvest is ensured when highland barley lies down in the fields, because its heads are heavy with grain. Wheat is the reverse. If it lies down early it signifies a reduced harvest, because it was pushed over by a strong wind before ripening and from full heads of grain. Highland barley stalks supply nutrition when the stalks fall over, but not wheat. A proverb goes 'There will be scoops of highland

Sixty-nine grudgingly agreed and left with a bag of bread. She ignored him until they went to bed that night, the result of Sishijinsuu's skillful arrangement.

"Go away! Sleep in another room!" Zhualimaxji said harshly, as he walked into the room behind her.

Sixty-nine remained silent.

"Why do you visit? To take me back? It's impossible for me to return!" she stormed.

Sixty-nine said nothing.

"Are you mute?" she said.

"I did come to ask you to come back home," Sixty-nine said.

"Leave, please. I won't return," she said, wrapping herself in a quilt and moving to one side of the bed.

Sixty-nine lay quietly. He dared not move closer immediately, in fear her anger might break out in violent kicks and scratches.

Time passed and Sixty-nine said, "Can I have a little of the cover, please? I'm about to freeze to death," stretching out his hand, and tugging the cover.

"No! No! No! Get away!" Zhualimaxji shouted, tightening the cover over herself.

Finally, Sixty-nine's repeated tugs forced Zhualimaxji to relinquish her rigorous defense. Sixty-nine seized her, pressed against her, and began moving his hungry body up and down frantically. Zhualimaxji remained silent, instead of pleasurably groaning and putting her hands tightly around his back.

When Sixty-nine was exhausted, he rolled off her, lay on his back, and felt gratified that he had completed the most difficult part of his mission. All that remained was to break through the torn opening. Just as he expected, Zhualimaxji asked, "Why did you ignore me when I called you from the lane after your mother and sisters insulted me?"

"I was ashamed because I was with some other young guys. You know how shameful it is if a wife comes openly and asks her husband to return home when he is with

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barley grain if it lies down, but only a handful of straw if wheat does the same'.

other young men. It shows no respect for a man," Sixty-nine said.

"I know, but I came for your aid at that moment. What did your mother tell you about our quarrel?" Zhualimaxji said.

"She said you scolded her for eating too much bread," Sixty-nine said.

Zhualimaxji said, "Nonsense! She was eating chicken and hid it from me when I entered. Our big red rooster had vanished. Your sisters shared it with their men. I saw this with my own eyes that night. Your mother was eating some left by her daughters. They hid bread from me and gave it to their visitors. They did not give me anything the night I returned tired and hungry from the fields, to find only a little broth left in the pot. Who wouldn't be angry to be treated like that?"

"I believe you. The men pursuing my sisters are behind all the unhappy disturbances in our home. But to be a good son and brother, I can't interfere in their personal affairs. If I support you against Mother, others will say I'm not filial. She's getting old. I need your understanding," Sixty-nine said.

"I understand, but I have no rights in your home. I can't even sell an egg. I've never even seen an egg there. Your mother locks them all in a small basket deep in her wood chest. She gives more sewing thread and needles to her daughters than to me. She orders me to do the heavy, dirty work while her daughters work and rest when they want. What a miserable life of suffering I have at your home!" she sighed and began sobbing.

Sixty-nine hugged her tightly, as she sobbed. The next day they returned home.

## ZHUALIMAXJI GIVES BIRTH

It was late in the second lunar month. The weather was growing warmer day by day, and the long accumulated snow of winter was melting. The narrow village lanes were extremely muddy with livestock further mixing the mud into a sticky, shoe-sucking loblolly.

Zhualimaxji pounded chunks of manure with a long-handled mallet in front of the courtyard gate. She shoveled the collected manure, spread it on the ground, and then pounded from one side to the other. They transported it to the fields after it was pulverized, and scattered it – fertilizer for the new crops.

As she was pounding the manure, Sixty-nine returned from an all-night gathering where he had told folktales to a faithful, appreciative audience in a village home. His fatigued eyes showed that he hadn't slept.

"Why are only you pounding the manure? Where are my sisters?" he asked.

"My dear treasured husband, they do their business without concern for urgent farm work. And you are the same. You are all busy people," Zhualimaxji replied.

"Tell me, please!" Sixty-nine said.

"Durijixji spent the whole night working hard with her visitor on her bed. She is enjoying her sleep now. Rnqaxji is washing pots unhurriedly. Sanjii has gone on an important mission to her sworn sister's home. She told your mother that during her sworn sister's brother's wedding ceremony, the bride suddenly farted while she was prostrating to the elders. She was so ashamed that she hung herself that night with her new colorful sash from an almond tree in her husband's garden plot, wearing what she had worn that morning when she entered the groom's courtyard."

"That means her husband didn't get to see the curly hair between her legs," Sixty-nine teased.

"Don't joke. How rude! You shouldn't tease about someone so unfortunate. Who knows what misfortune might come if you make fun of others' bad luck!" Zhualimaxji said.

"I know! It's a real tragedy, if it truly happened." Sixty-nine said guilty.

"I have little confidence in Sanjii's accounts. She probably made an excuse to visit one of her lovers and shirk family work," Zhualimaxji said.

"Be sure to take good care of my baby," Sixty-nine said as he gazed at her protruding belly, and then went inside.

Dozens of days passed and people were now working in the fields. Sixty-nine's family was busy filling long wool bags with manure, loading them on donkeys and horses, transporting them to the fields, piling the manure in rows at about three meter intervals, and covering the manure with dry soil immediately, in order to prevent it from losing its effect, which happened when it was directly exposed to the air. They spread the manure just before they plowed and seeded.

Zhualimaxji asked her mother-in-law for permission to not do heavy work, since she would soon give birth.

Sanjii came home hungry and tired after several trips of hauling manure to the fields. She entered the kitchen, ate barley bread, and drank some water. Her face expressed awful dissatisfaction with the heavy loading work.

"We had breakfast just a few hours ago. You get hungry quickly," Xjirimu commented.

"Can I not be hungry? I have made several round trips of manure work," Sanjii replied.

"Did you load the manure bags onto the donkeys and horses all by yourself?" Xjirimu asked.

"I just hate it when someone is working, but someone else is enjoying herself during this urgent farming time," she said.

Zhualimaxji heard this as she was putting dried dung inside the sleeping platform to be later set on fire to smolder and warm the platform.

"Your sister-in-law shouldn't work. She'll give birth in a couple of days," Xjirimu said.

"Oh! What woman has not been pregnant? What woman has not given birth? Don't other women work until the time the baby emerges from its mother's belly?" Sanjii bellowed.

A fire burned in Zhualimaxji's chest. She stopped work, rushed out, and shouted, "OK! I'm wrong. I'll go work. You please stay at home and enjoy yourself!"

Durijixji helped her fill bags with manure and load them on the donkeys and horses. She was full of anger as she walked to the fields.

Together with Durijixji, she drove the livestock ahead, up the steep path. As they started down a quick turn to a gully, a rabbit sprang out. The horses and donkeys were frightened and madly ran about, tossing the heavy bags onto the ground. Manure spilled from some of the bags.

They caught the animals, brought them together, and loaded them again. Durijixji lifted the bags while Zhualimaxji held the reins and helped Durijixji lift the bags. Suddenly, warm water flowed down her legs, wetting her trousers as a blast of pain moved down from her belly followed by something large that abruptly slid out onto the ground. Blood and water stained her embroidered shoes.

"Wa-wa!" a tiny infant screamed.

Bean-sized pearls of sweat rolled down Zhualimaxji's pale face. Her legs quivered as she slowly sat by the baby, took her to her bosom, and sucked the baby's nostrils and mouth clean. She scoured the blood and ropy liquid from her body by rubbing it with dry soil. She put the baby in her warm robe pouch and waited for someone to come.

Durijixji ran home and told Xjirimu what had happened. Xjirimu soon arrived, cut the umbilical cord with a pair of rusty, blunt scissors and tied the bleeding navel cord with a blue string. Xjirimu wrapped the baby in wool cloth, put her in her robe pouch, and put the placenta in a basket. Durijixji and Xjirimu held Zhualimaxji on either side and slowly walked home. Zhualimaxji stepped over a previously lit fire in front of the gate and entered her bedroom. She glared at Sanjii, who looked embarrassed and guilty, standing by the gate, covering most of her face with her sleeve.

Xjirimu dug a deep hole with a trowel in the floor in front of Zhualimaxji's bed and buried the placenta to ensure more children would be born. Rnqaxji brought wheat-flour broth to warm Zhualimaxji.

Zhualimaxji held her baby and watched as she nursed with tightly shut eyes. She thought her baby's future would be unfortunate since babies born outside the home either had short or miserable lives. She watched her nurse and murmured, "I'm sorry. I'm an unqualified mother, but I had no choice. This uncaring family forced this situation. I'm innocent and you are too," she murmured, as two lines of tears dribbled onto her baby.

She heard a crow caw, causing Zhualimaxji to fear all the more for her baby's future.

Ground roasted-wheat seed broth was cooked for her in the morning. She had bread and boiled water for lunch, and noodles for supper. The broth and noodles were unsalted for it is taboo for a confined woman to have salt. Women who have recently given birth can easily contract disease and the key to preventing this is in the month of confinement. Most illnesses are the result of what happens during the lying-in time. Such other possibilities as a poor diet, poorly heated beds, and resuming work too soon are ignored.

Zhualimaxji hoped to see pork in her noodle bowl every night, but it never came. One afternoon, she bravely told Xjirimu that she wanted to eat meat and was told there would be some in the next meal. Xjirimu took a chunk of dried pig fat from the flour-filled wood chest she kept in her room where the pork was stored, put it inside a pot of boiling water, removed it after a few minutes, and then returned it to the chest after it had dried. Thus her 'meat' was soup with lard.

When Sixty-nine learned this, he unhappily told his mother to cut some pieces of pork and give his wife.

Xjirimu angrily shouted, "Where is there such pork in our home? All women do as I have done."

"Let's kill a chicken, cook it, and give it to her to strengthen her body," Sixty-nine said.

"No! Absolutely not! We cannot. We have few chickens," Xjirimu replied.



"Can she not have one? Why did your daughters have one some days ago?" Sixty-nine asked.

"Who told you we killed one? I will toss shit in their mouth," Xjirimu roared, her eyeballs bulging.

Her three daughters ran in and ferociously rebuked Sixty-nine, "You are so fierce! Are you going to kill Mother?" they shouted, pushing and pulling Xjirimu into the kitchen.

The following night Sixty-nine caught a pigeon from its nest above the kitchen door and killed it. As he was plucking the feathers and throwing them into the swill bucket, Xjirimu came in and scolded, "You killed a pigeon! Are you going to cut off the line of our family's prosperity now? Are you creating misfortune for our family?"

Sixty-nine angrily retorted, "Go ahead and eat it yourself, if you don't want the lying-in woman to have it," and tossed the pigeon into the courtyard.

Durijixji picked it up and hung it from a house column. The next morning it had disappeared. The family cat had snatched it and eaten it. Only its skeleton was left atop a pile of straw in the straw room.

The days passed and on the morning of the baby's name-giving celebration, everything was ready. Xjirimu, the baby's grandmother however, still deliberately stayed in bed.

Sixty-nine helplessly walked into her room and said, "Mother, please get up. Everything is prepared. Clan elders are waiting for you on the *pei*."

"Proceed with the cerebation. I won't participate in your name-giving cerebation," she said, turning her head aside.

"Mother, we need you. How can we perform it without you? You need to name the baby. No one can do this but you," Sixty-nine said.

"You're a great man. You give a name to your baby!" Xjirimu replied sarcastically.

"I know you're still angry with me. I'm sorry for what I said. I have no right to give her a name. You are her grandmother. You are the only who can give a name to your granddaughter," Sixty-nine said.

Finally, Xjirimu agreed and came in. Everyone stood and asked her to sit in the most important seat. Zhualimaxji handed her baby to Xjirimu, who held the baby in her arms, looked at her, and said, "The baby's name is Layahua."<sup>66</sup>

Everyone was surprised. "Mother, why would you give her such a name? She was not born in the twelfth moon, but in the second moon. Are you planning to give her another name?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"No. I thought she would be born in the twelfth moon, and I have wanted to give her that name since she was born. I think it's suitable. I won't change it," Xjirimu said.

Everyone looked at each other silently.

"OK, please give Layahua to me," Sixty-nine said, breaking the awkward silence and then he urged the guests to eat.

In the following months, Zhualimaxji fled Xjirimu and her daughters and went to a distant relative's home. It took Sixty-nine's family many days to find her and ask her to return. By this time, however, she had decided it was not her destiny to live at Sixty-nine's home and returned to her father's home.

Sishijinsuu and other family members repeatedly insisted that she stay at her husband's home. This was because, despite the many disputes at Xjirimu's home, Sixty-nine treated her kindly, though he lacked the courage to oppose his mother and sisters.

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<sup>66</sup> Literally: the twelfth moon flower.

## A DEVASTATING HAILSTORM

That year, Sixty-nine's village *pram* designated him to be the village's 'green crops officer', which kept him extremely busy. It was his duty to prevent hailstorms from damaging the crops. This was particularly important when the grain ripened because it is then that hailstorms are most common.

Sixty-nine went to the mountaintop behind his village, offered juniper incense, and prostrated in all directions to all the *pram*, beseeching Great Heaven to protect their village crops from hailstorms. He realized his daily work, though a heavy burden, was vital and if he did not implement his task well, *pram* and Great Heaven would be unhappy and surely send hailstorms to damage the crops.

He regularly collected rapeseed oil, flour, and pork in a bag from village households to entertain monks from Rgulang Monastery, who chanted scriptures ensuring the safety of the village crops. Occasionally, he organized villagers to gather and offer a sheep to satisfy all *pram* and Great Heaven. He asked the *pram* at nonscheduled times what the villagers should know and what rites related to crops they should perform at different crop growing periods. According to the *pram's* guidance, he organized villagers to bury a horse skull or a sacred vase atop a mountain facing the northwest, where hailstorms originated. He also frequently asked villagers to chant scriptures.

Sixty-nine climbed the mountain as usual one day, offered cypress incense, prostrated, and then walked through the fields to inspect the growing crops. It was late afternoon. Suddenly a dense cloud mass formed northwest of the village behind the mountain. Sixty-nine watched these ill-intentioned clouds as they rapidly thickened and grew larger. He raced to the village and directly entered the building housing the village *pram*. He and another man quickly

carried the *pram* up the high slope. Sixty-nine then asked the *pram* what they should do to defend the crops so the dreadful clouds would not destroy them. Seeing the *pram* furiously moving back and forth, they realized the seriousness of the situation.

The sun soon hid behind boiling dark clouds that covered much of the sky. Lightning flashes streaked across the sky chased by deafening ripples of thunder in rapid succession. The evil, frightful clouds tightly stared at the land and seemed to be unfeelingly swallowing up all creatures on earth.

The fitful sound of a conch shell horn resounded above the village and the sound of clashing cymbals rattled in the lanes. The villagers panicked. Some climbed up on their house roofs, others left their courtyards and prostrated to the northwest, chanting the Six Sacred Syllables.

Suddenly, hailstones the size of pigeon's eggs hurled by gale force winds hurtled from the sky, plopping heavily onto the earth. The space between the sky and earth was filled with hundreds of thousands of falling white ice chunks. Villagers huddled under the roofs of their courtyard gates, dully observing the hailstones decimating their crops. They continued chanting "*O manii banii huang*" until the hailstorm stopped a bit later.

The crops were utterly devastated. Women wept as men silently sat on the ground, puffing their pipes. The year's work was in vain. Starvation loomed. Straw for livestock fodder and fuel for fire would surely be in short supply.

Zhualimaxji hastily returned from her grandmother's home the next day. She entered the kitchen and asked her mother-in-law, sitting on the *pei*, "Mother, are you sitting well?"

"Hum," Xjirimu responded, without looking at her.

"Please go to your grandmother," Zhualimaxji said to Danjansuu.

"Please watch her yourself. I'm in no mood to look after her now," Xjirimu said.

Zhualimaxji was embarrassed, because she had spent seven days at her home, although she had been allowed only five days.

"How many days did I allow you to stay at your father's home?" Xjirimu asked.

"Sorry, I was delayed," Zhualimaxji replied.

Sixty-nine came in with his long-stem pipe in his mouth.

"Why? What did you do in that extra time?" Xjirimu questioned.

"Sewing," Zhualimaxji quietly replied.

"We would have been successful in collecting more vegetables from the garden plot if you had returned on time. Are you now satisfied that all our vegetables are gone?" Xjirimu scolded.

"All our crops were damaged. Are you still mourning the vegetables we lost? Which are more important?" Sixty-nine asked.

"Shut up! I'm not talking to you! Will you attack me together? Will you two cause my death?" Xjirimu scolded madly, standing, and running into the courtyard.

Xjirimu asked three elders to come to her home. They called Sixty-nine and Zhualimaxji and said, "You two disobedient members of the younger generation! How dare you abuse your mother! We don't want unfilial young people in our clan. We will ask clan members to come hang you upside down from the house beam and beat you to death! Sixty-nine, discipline your wife!"

## NAYANSUU'S DEATH

**Z**hualimaxji's first daughter, Nayansuu, had swelling in her legs, eyelids, and abdomen. She refused to eat or play with other children and lay quietly in her bed most of the time. When Zhualimaxji went to visit her father's home, Nayansuu cried to go with her. She missed her great-grandmother, who had cared for her while she was a baby. However, she was not allowed to visit after she got sick. Xjirimu's family *pram* communicated that it was bad for her disease if she visited and that she should not go until she recovered completely.

Nayansuu's abdomen became swollen and Xjirimu guessed that she had a liver disease. She treated her by pushing her hand against her upper abdomen, where the liver is located, starting from the front and lower part of her abdomen, while saying, "Liver repositioning? Yes! Liver repositioning? Yes!" While Xjirimu was carrying out this treatment, she asked Nayansuu to move her thumbs and big toes, bending and unbending them, and raising her forehead up and down, in that order. She thought this might be effective, based on her experience of treating patients who lived in and near her village.

Meanwhile, Xjirimu collected Danjansuu's morning urine and told Nayansuu to drink it and wash the swollen parts of her body with it – young children's urine helped reduce swelling.

Sixty-nine frequently asked his *pram* about Nayansuu. Once it indicated that his family should prohibit strangers from entering the front gate for three months to prevent them from bringing evils, which were the true cause of her sickness. Sixty-nine then put a juniper branch on the front gate roof, signifying no one should enter. All the family expected Nayansuu to recover three months later.

Two months passed and Nayansuu's illness continued unabated. Zhualimaxji and Sixty-nine hoped that she would improve in the remaining month. To provide better care, they told Nayansuu to sleep with them.

One night, Nayansuu went to bed and slept soundly. At about midnight, they were awakened by a thud on the house roof. Sixty-nine guessed it was his sisters' lovers. He waited to see if his sisters would go open the gate and ask them in. He vowed to scold them if they did. His sisters did not go outside, however, in respect of the prohibition against visitors.

Banging sounded in the courtyard. Sixty-nine thought this was unusual, got up, and peeped out the window. He saw two men leaning a ladder against the house roof. Sixty-nine thought this was odd, because he took away the ladder each night so no one could reach the house roof. He ran out of his room and shouted, "Thief! Where are you?"

The shadow of the two men disappeared from the roof and slid down against the house wall to the outside. They did not take away the ladder they had brought.

"Have they come into the courtyard?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"No, I luckily found them before they could," Sixty-nine replied.

"They were up on the roof. You'd better do an expelling evil ritual for Nayansuu," Zhualimaxji said.

Sixty-nine agreed, went to the kitchen, took ash from the stove, and wet the ash with water. He returned to the room, and tapped it on Nayansuu's head and upper body, holding the wet ash in his hand, "*Tui*, there is no food to eat and no water to drink in my home. Leave as quickly as possible from her and our home," he said, then ran to the courtyard and threw the wet ash outside, over the courtyard wall.

"Now she will be safe," Sixty-nine said, walking into his room.

"They were brave to come here for romance! Your sisters should let them know Nayansuu's situation and that the message on the gate forbids entry," Zhualimaxji said.

"Such shameless young men care little about such prohibitions in achieving their sexual conquests," Sixty-nine replied.

The next morning Sixty-nine chopped the ladder to pieces with an ax while shouting, "The thieves were so courageous that they brought their own ladder," and then burned it.

His sisters pretended the incident had nothing to do with them and ignored him.

A few days later Nayansuu was unable to urinate and died while having convulsions.

Later, Sixty-nine learned from his family *pram* that she had died from evil that invaded her during the time his front gate had been strictly off limits to visitors. The two 'thief' visitors were unconcerned about her death. The *pram* further indicated there was something in the home related to her death. The *pram* did not give further detail, despite Sixty-nine's pious entreaties.

Later, Xjirimu learned more about the evil related to her granddaughter's death. A woman had hung herself at the home of one of the thieves. Her ghost was attracted to the ladder and closely guarded it. The ghost hated Sixty-nine for chopping the ladder to pieces and burning it and then made Nayansuu worse, causing her death.

Xjirimu secretly told the ladder story only to her daughters. They were embarrassed and felt guilty. She did not tell Sixty-nine and his wife. She told Sixty-nine to invite monks from Rgulang Monastery to their home and chant scriptures to ensure safety and a better future for the family.



## A STRUGGLE OVER GRANDCHILDREN

One summer day, Zhualimaxji was freed from field work by a constant drizzle. She sat on her bed, alone in her room, and embroidered a sash for Danjansuu to wear at her future wedding. She recalled Nayansuu. Twelve months had passed since her death. "If she were still alive, this embroidered sash would be hers, not Danjansuu's. She would be learning embroidery and wedding and funeral songs in preparation for her future life," she thought sadly, tears stinging her eyes.

The room to her door suddenly opened. Sanjii entered and said "Sister-in-law, please return my tiny embroidery needle!" Her expression showed urgency and discomfort at having lost her needle.

"I didn't borrow your needle. You didn't give it to me. I have my own needles," Zhualimaxji replied in surprise.

"Didn't you borrow it from me some time ago?" Sanjii said.

"No, I didn't," Zhualimaxji answered.

"Let me see the needle you are holding," Sanjii said.

"Please look as much as you like! They are all mine," Zhualimaxji said.

"I don't believe you. You must be hiding it. Where is your *jixijog*?<sup>67</sup> I will check to see if my needles are inside your dowry chest!"

"No! It's my private case!" Zhualimaxji shouted.

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<sup>67</sup> A triangular ornament for women where needles are kept (pincushion). The outside is embroidered with colorful threads in flower patterns. It is hung on the right thigh and worn at festivals. It was generally kept inside women's dowry chests that were given by their parents when they moved to their husbands' homes.

Sanjii ignored her and opened the unlocked chest. She took out her *jixijog* and said, "Look! This must be mine. Mother gave each of us only one of these tiny needles. Why do you have two?" Sanjii said, holding Zhualimaxji's *jixijog* in her hand.

"My grandmother gave it to me the last time I visited her," Zhualimaxji said.

"It's impossible that you could get a needle from your father's home," Sanjii ferociously proclaimed and turned to leave with the needle.

Zhualimaxji jumped off her bed, moved forward, and tried to grab the needle from Sanjii's hand. Sanjii did not let go. Zhualimaxji was enraged and kicked her legs. Sanjii burst into screams and fought back, hitting Zhualimaxji's head. At that moment Sanjii's sisters and mother came in. Sanjii deliberately cried out loudly and pretended that she was being bullied, putting her hand on her leg where she had been kicked.

Rnqaxji pulled Zhualimaxji's hair braids while Sanjii beat her on her back with a stick. Rnqaxji scolded, "Duwa bitch! What are you doing to Sanjii? Are you going to kick her to death? Get out from our home if you don't want to stay. We don't need such a worthless sister-in-law!"

Zhualimaxji was unable to withstand their onslaught and shouted, "I will leave if you don't want me!" and trotted out of the courtyard gate. She put Layahua on her back and led Danjansuu by the hand and ran down the path toward her village.

Later, Xjirimu and her daughters found Danjansuu and Layahua were gone and wanted to get them back, but they were already too far behind Zhualimaxji. When Zhualimaxji reached her father's home, she sadly related how her mother-in-law and her three daughters mistreated and beat her. She concluded it was impossible to live in their home and vowed to never return.

Sishijinsuu understood life was miserable at Xjirimu's home and said, "I agree. I don't think you can live at your husband's home with those three daughters. The same would be true for any woman in such a complicated family. It's also an improper home for children to grow up in, since

Nayansuu died and Rnqaxji's two babies also died. We must guard your daughters. I'm afraid they will kidnap them."

Several days later Sixty-nine came to ask Zhualimaxji to return, but Zhualimaxji's brothers drove him away and scolded him, saying that he was a poor husband, incapable of being the master of his home.

Several months later a respected village elder visited Zhualimaxji and said that they sincerely apologized for beating Zhualimaxji and guaranteed there would be no next time. Despite the old man's entreaties and promises, Zhualimaxji and her family refused. Zhualimaxji asked the old man to help her retrieve her only personal possession – her dowry chest, where her wedding dress and embroidery materials were stored. The old man promised, but the chest was never delivered.

Xjirimu thought Zhualimaxji would not return and wanted her granddaughters. She decided to kidnap them. She walked to Zhualimaxji's village and found Danjansuu playing with other children in a muddy pool near Zhualimaxji' father's courtyard. She took Danjansuu by the arm and walked back toward her own village.

Sishijinsuu soon learned that an old woman was leading Danjansuu toward Yomajaa Village. She was sure it was Xjirimu and immediately gave chase. When she reached the entrance of Yomajaa Village, she saw an old lady leading a child up the path to Xjirimu's village. She soon caught up with Xjirimu atop the mountain. She snatched Danjansuu's legs and pulled, meanwhile Xjirimu grasped Danjansuu's upper arms and pulled. Sishijinsuu pulled, shouting, "Give her to me! You don't want her mother to live at your home! Why do you steal her daughter?"

"She is my granddaughter, a member of my family!" Xjirimu shouted back.

"No! Was she born at your home? Her mother took her to your home. Return our girl now!" Sishijinsuu shouted furiously.

The two old women pulled Danjansuu back and forth with all their strength. Danjansuu felt as though her body would be ripped apart and shrieked in pain.

At this juncture, Xjirimu's three daughters came and furiously scratched Sishijinsuu's hands and face. Though Sishijinsuu was strong she was outnumbered by her rivals and finally was forced to loosen her hands. Her face and hands bled and she was exhausted, but she still hurled abuse at them.

Many villagers came to mediate. The old man who had been to her home asking Zhualimaxji to return escorted Sishijinsuu back to her own village, but Xjirimu had won the struggle.



## ZHUALIMAXJI FLEES TO JILOGHUALI

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**Z**hualimaxji stayed at her father's home doing housework and weeding the fields with her brother's wife. She chatted with Sishijinsuu, sewed, and embroidered. Though there was harmony between family members, she was depressed. Staying in her father's home was not her life goal. One night she confided to Sishijinsuu, "I've decided to go far away to seek a new life."

"Where? Why don't you stay with us here? A family will send a matchmaker to propose to you in due time," Sishijinsuu said.

"I don't want to live near here. I'll never find a man as suitable as Sixty-nine. If I lived here I would always think about him and easily meet him, which would be terrible. Conflicts with my brother's wife and other family members will surely occur if I stay here longer. I will go to Jiloghuali," Zhualimaxji concluded.

"Where is Jiloghuali? How will you get there?" Sishijinsuu asked.

"I don't know exactly. It's not far after I cross the Chileb Mountains.<sup>68</sup> I'll ask passersby on the way," Zhualimaxji replied confidently.

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<sup>68</sup> The Chileb Mountains in Huzhu rise 4,000 meters above sea level. On such times as the first and fifteenth days of the first lunar month, Mongghul climb to the top of certain mountain peaks in this range (there are nine holy peaks), prostrate, and offer sacrifices to Great Heaven, hoping for bumper harvests and hoping their crops and livestock will not be harmed by calamitous weather and disease. Reaching a Chileb summit brings supplicants closer to Heaven, and thus their supplications are more easily noted, considered, and granted. Many Mongghul men proudly recount the dangers they overcame in reaching the central, holiest peak.

"Women truly need to live separate from their parents when they mature. I understand this. I also heard that a woman from our neighbor village fled to Jiloghuali several years ago. She never returned. Someone met her in Jiloghuali and reported she had a new family. You, too, may find a better life there. Unfortunately, it's unlikely they'll have sufficient farm land, and you'll have to cultivate new land once you settle. There are boundless forests and grassland. Firewood is not a worry and people there herd as many livestock as they like. Those who live there are criminals, those who fled conscription into Ma Bufang's army, and gamblers fleeing debt. It's not a safe place," Sishijinsuu concluded.

"What you say is probably true, but I've decided to go. I must leave," Zhualimaxji said.

"Go if you have decided. Burn incense and prostrate at Rgulang Monastery before leaving. Ask for help for you new life," Sishijinsuu said.

Zhualimaxji reached Rgulang Monastery early in the morning after breakfast two days later. She entered the sutra halls where women were allowed, prostrated, and recited "*O manii banii huang*," beseeching the deities to generously extend a bright road to her and her daughter.

Many people dressed in mourning clothes knelt in the courtyard of the main sutra hall. Their foreheads were bent forward, nearly touching the wood floor as they concentrated on listening to hundreds of monks chanting inside the sutra hall.

She walked near the doorway. A familiar hatless figure dressed in a black sheepskin robe greeted her eyes from the front row. His forehead regularly touched the wood floor as he placed his hands by his head. He fixedly knelt and concentrated on chanting. She asked a monk where the mourners were from. She was told that an old carpenter had died in the monastery. A grand funeral was being held for him, because he had dedicated his life and carpentry work to the monastery. His cremated bone ash had been scattered on the holy peak behind the monastery as though he were a monk.

Zhualimaxji realized this must have been Sixty-nine's carpenter-uncle, and the mourners were his relatives and clan members. The familiar figure was her husband – Sixty-nine. She left quickly and silently, praying in her heart for the pious carpenter-uncle.

She reached Zankang<sup>69</sup> Temple, built in the southwest part of the monastery complex. It was taboo for women to enter. She stood before the temple gate and gazed at images of the legendary hero – King Foorigisigari – vividly painted on the gate and walls. She piously prostrated as everyone in Duluun Lunkuang territory did. When they met difficulties they prayed at the Zankang and believed help would instantly come.

Zhualimaxji's father had asked their village *pram* the night before she left what Zhualimaxji and her daughter should do to have a safe journey and obtain a good life. The *pram* indicated Zhualimaxji and her daughter should never forget it and pray to it when they met trouble. The *pram* also bestowed an embroidered amulet to each of them. Her father took a strip of sacred cloth from the *pram* pole, which Zhualimaxji's grandmother cut and sewed into amulets. Zhualimaxji and her daughter wore these around their necks.

Zhualimaxji burned incense and prostrated in her family shrine room early the next morning. She put two-year-old Layahua on her back after a simple breakfast, put steamed bread in her robe pouch, bid farewell, and set off.

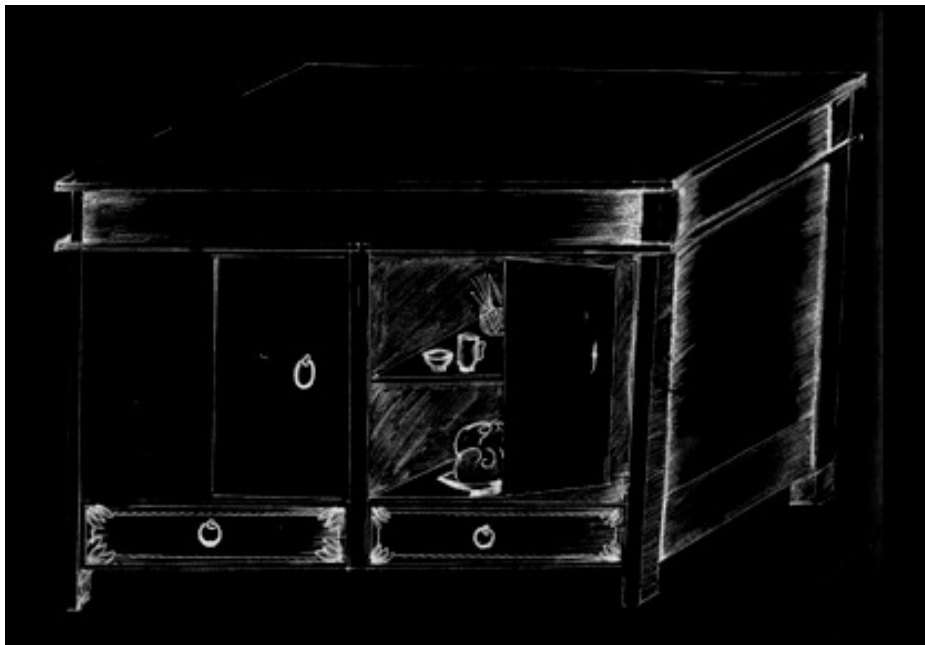
Sishijinsuu walked ahead to be sure they did not encounter villagers carrying empty water buckets, precursors of bad luck. Zhualimaxji told Sishijinsuu she need not escort them further when they reached the village entrance.

"Beware of wild animals and evil men. Come see me when you find a good life. I want to visit and see Jiloghuali for myself," Sishijinsuu said.

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<sup>69</sup> A spirit hall (*btsan khang*) in Rgulang Monastery that houses King Foorigisigari, a rival of King Gesar. It is strictly taboo for those who venerate deities in the Zankang to sing Gesar songs and display his images inside or outside their homes and in temples.

Zhualimaxji did not answer, but her eyes brimmed with tears. She turned and walked toward the Chileb Mountains. This was the last time Zhualimaxji saw Sishijinsuu, for she never returned.





## KING GESAR

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**Z**hualimaxji reached Mantuu<sup>70</sup> Monastery late in the afternoon. After a quick visit, she hurried on. Still later she met a man on horseback. The rider stopped, dismounted, and asked, "Hey! It's you – Aunt Yomajaa! Where are you going with your child?"

"Uncle Foorijang!<sup>71</sup> I'm going to Jiloghuali. Are you returning from there?" Zhualimaxji asked in surprise, taking her daughter from her back.

"Yes, just returning. You're a woman! What are you doing traveling alone with your little daughter? I'm afraid you'll lose your way!" he said.

"I'm sure we can find the way and reach Jiloghuali if I ask fellow travelers," Zhualimaxji replied confidently.

"Are you fleeing your mother-in-law's home?" the man asked. He had observed that eight out of ten single women walking to Jiloghuali were fleeing their husbands' home, mistreated by their mothers-in-law or beaten by their husbands.

"Yes," Zhualimaxji said.

"Don't walk at night through Langshida Valley. Wild animals and criminals make it dangerous. Have you brought money with you?" he said.

"I have no money," Zhualimaxji answered.

"Here is one coin for the bridge-crossing fee at Jilo River," he said, handing her a coin. "It will be dark soon. Ask to stay the night in a herdsman's home in the valley," he

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<sup>70</sup> Located in the north of today's Danma Town, this small monastery is built on a mountain slope in a deep, narrow valley. It is a subsidiary of Rgulang Monastery. The seven monks there were all Mongghul in 2007.

<sup>71</sup> A village near Duwa Village.

said, pointing to the valley. He then mounted his horse and rode toward his home.

Zhualimaxji reached a fork in the road at sunset. One path twisted and turned far into the distance, the other led to a narrow valley. Following the man's directions, she walked into the valley and up a slope where she found three herdsmen's homes built near each other. A river rushed by stone walls. She walked to the nearest wall and a huge black dog began barking madly from a corner of the enclosure. Afraid it would break loose from its chain or pull its peg out of the ground, Zhualimaxji dared go no further. Then an old woman came, stood by her dog, and said something to Zhualimaxji in Tibetan. Zhualimaxji understood nothing. She guessed the old lady might be asking who she was and replied in Mongghul, "It's me, Aunt."

"Who are you? Why are you visiting my home so late?" the old woman asked, switching to Mongghul.

"I'm a traveler from Rgulang Monastery. May I stay in your home ? Is that OK, Aunt?" Zhualimaxji implored.

The woman shouted at her dog and invited Zhualimaxji inside. Zhualimaxji picked up her daughter and carefully entered the home through a low, small door. An old man with darting eyes greeted her and then continued chanting from the scriptures on his lap, illuminated by a dim butter lamp on his *pei*. Zhualimaxji set her daughter down and sat near the yak-dung-fueled fire to warm up. She noticed the walls were piled-up stones and the roof was made of crude pieces of wood. The room was small and the roof was low.

The old woman offered milk tea and *taligha*,<sup>72</sup> and told her to help herself. The man finished chanting and asked something in Tibetan that Zhualimaxji did not understand. Eventually she learned the old Mongghul woman had married this Tibetan man and moved into his home. She spoke Tibetan to her husband. The two had lived there for more than twenty years. The old woman switched between Tibetan and Mongghul as she talked to Zhualimaxji.

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<sup>72</sup> Roasted barley flour.

Zhualimaxji slept on the kitchen floor by the stove, got up early the next morning, and prepared to leave. The old woman said, "You don't know the way. I'll go with you. I need to check my yaks on the mountains," and picked up her herding sling. They left together.

The old woman told Zhualimaxji the names of local mountains and valleys, and stories about them. She introduced the local herdsmen and their background. As they talked and walked, a soaring peak loomed into view. Lofty, rocky cliffs circled the mountaintop. Standing at the foot and looking up at the cliffs was thrilling.

The old woman pointed to the mountain and said, "This is Jingang Mountain.<sup>73</sup> A small monastery here is called Jingang Monastery. Tughuan Living Buddha controls it and sent monks here from Rgulang Monastery. They are his favorite, most loyal followers. When he returns from expeditions to Aloxa,<sup>74</sup> he brings countless treasures on yaks, camels, and horses here before continuing to Rgulang Monastery. He stores his treasures here, in Jingang Monastery. It seems to be a monastery, but actually the monks guard the treasures from robbers and during rebellions. Their sole religious activity is chanting. Strangers are forbidden. Few have been inside the cliffs. The monks suffer from a lack of drinking water and must fetch water in buckets on their backs from a spring behind the mountain. A round trip requires several hours."

Zhualimaxji remembered that one of her great uncles had been a monk under Tughuan Living Buddha in Rgulang Monastery for many years and had never returned home. She had heard he had been given an important position and sent far away. She guessed he had been sent to this monastery, enclosed by precipitous cliffs. They continued walking and in time, another mountain presented itself. The old woman said, "Do you see that mountain? There are two big matching holes in the cliff atop that mountain. Guess how they were formed?"

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<sup>73</sup> Located in today's Danma Town, Huzhu County.

<sup>74</sup> Located in today's Alashan Banner, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region.

"I don't know," Zhualimaxji said.

"Long ago, King Gesar fought his rival, King Foorigisigari. Before they battled, King Gesar used his slingshot and shot two huge boulders at the cliff to demonstrate his power. This explains the two holes in the cliff. Others say that King Gesar was tired after defeating King Foorigisigari and sat on the cliff. His testicles were so big and heavy that the two holes were formed," the old woman said.

"I heard King Foorigisigari once defeated King Gesar in battle and stole King Gesar's lovely wife. Right?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"True! King Gesar left to suppress a rebellion in a faraway place. Finally, his followers thought he must have died on the battlefield. It was then that King Foorigisigari stole his first wife, the one Gesar loved most. Later, when King Gesar returned after suppressing the rebellion, he learned his wife had been kidnapped. He immediately went to King Foorigisigari's land to ask for his wife, and got her back without difficulty. Afterwards, the two sides lived in harmony and frequently contacted each other, though they had countless battles before," the old woman said knowledgeably.

"How do you know all these things in such detail?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"From my husband. He knows many stories about King Gesar and can also sing about him. I'll tell you more after we climb up that mountain," she said, pointing to another mountain in the distance.

They walked to the mountaintop along a winding path. When they reached the top, the old woman pointed and said, "This place is the border between our local area and Jiloghuali. This side is a farming area and the other side is forest and grassland – Jiloghuali. Walk down that narrow sunken path until you reach the valley bottom. King Gesar's hound pulled its big chain down the mountain following Gesar, gouging out that path."

"What a vivid story!" Zhualimaxji said.

"Go along the sunken path. I must go this other way to check the yaks we drove up into the mountains a half-

month ago. I hope they're near. I'll spend several days collecting them and driving them back near their enclosure if they are grazing on the Jiloghuali side," the old woman said, taking out some fresh cheese and giving it to Layahua, who was on her mother's back.

Zhualimaxji thanked her for accompanying them and telling her such interesting stories. The old woman smiled and strode off towards yet another mountain range.



AT A HERDSMAN'S HOME

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**Z**hualimaxji walked down the path to a small, level place surrounded by numerous, different-sized stones. She took Layahua from her back and they rested by a creek. She sat on a stone, ate bread, and drank water in her cupped hands. She realized how ethereally beautiful it was. Hills surrounded the area. There were gullies and immense forests. Brooks flowed through deep, serene gorges, converging in a big river at the bottom of the main valley.

She followed the path south along a river that was so clear that the bed was easily visible. Branches and twigs trembled in disorder on the water surface. Small fish flitted in the water. Simple wood bridges spanned the river. Shrubs and trees she could not name greened the banks along the river as it babbled to an ancient rhythm. Many little birds pursued each other in treetops. The hills on the riversides were covered with juniper, pine, birch, and spruce. An edible plant with leaves shaped like deer-ears grew here and there. Rare flowers bloomed all over the mountains. Occasionally, rabbits, deer, blue sheep, and lynx moved among the trees. The roaring of wild animals sounded from time to time. Many *lasizi* were built atop the mountains.

Zhualimaxji so enjoyed the beautiful scenery that she almost forgot her homeless predicament until the valley suddenly narrowed dramatically. The two rocky sides rushed to the sky, revealing only a thin line of blue high above. Worrying that they might meet a dead end, she sped up. The narrow passageway soon opened wide again, revealing a herding enclosure, wall, and small rooms built atop a hill near the river.

As dusk fell, she decided to ask to stay at a herdsman's home. She walked up to a home and saw an old lady driving white yaks toward her enclosure. Her hair was

divided into many tiny braids that fell down her back. She wore a heavy, white yak-skin robe. Her right arm was outside her robe sleeve. She waited as Zhualimaxji approached. Zhualimaxji thought she must be Tibetan but asked in Mongghul, hoping she would understand, "Aunt, may I spend the night at your home?"

"Hello! Where are you from?" the old lady replied in Mongghul.

Zhualimaxji was delighted she spoke Mongghul and said, "I'm from near Rgulang Monastery."

"Oh! You are from Rgulang!" the old lady said in surprise, carefully inspecting this woman dressed in tattered Mongghul clothes with her little daughter, and then invited Zhualimaxji into her home, where she lived with her husband. She offered milk tea, yogurt, and dried yak meat.

"Which part of Rgulang are you from?" the old lady asked.

"From Duwa Village, near Rgulang," Zhualimaxji replied.

"I know that place. I went there several times with my mother to worship in the monastery when I was younger, before I fled here," the old lady said.

"You fled here?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"Yes, my parent's home is in Lughuari.<sup>75</sup> I married a man and moved into his home in a neighbor village. Later my husband gambled and lost his horse and saddle, and then eventually all the family property. Finally he paid off his debts with me. The man he owed came and took me back to his home to be his wife. I did not agree and fled here. As I escaped, I asked a Tibetan couple if I could stay the night in their home and told them my entire story. Finally, they asked me to become their daughter, because they were childless. I agreed. Later they died and I was alone. A man fleeing from being forced into Lord Ma's army stopped by one night and we then lived together in this home. His natal home is in Naja.<sup>76</sup> We now herd yaks on the hillsides here in Langshida

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<sup>75</sup> Located in today's Taizi Township, Huzhu County.

<sup>76</sup> In today's Naja Mongghul Village, Weiyuan Town, Huzhu County.

Valley. We enjoy living in this beautiful valley, even though we are far from our homes and isolated from the outside."

Zhualimaxji was delighted to hear that this woman had found a wonderful place to live and was now living a happy life with her husband, despite her initial misfortunes.

"Oh, dear Aunt, I'm now also fleeing with my daughter," Zhualimaxji said.

"I thought so, but I dared not ask. Why? Is your husband a gambler, too?" the lady asked sympathetically.

"No. He never gambles. It's his three *tulighui juuligha* sisters at home. They and my mother-in-law often abused me," Zhualimaxji said.

"Your husband treated you well, right?" the old woman said.

"Yes, he is nice, but he wouldn't stand up for me in fear of offending his mother and sisters," Zhualimaxji said sadly.

"You should have insisted. Life is difficult for everybody. Many have fled here, seeking a better life, and many have failed. They starved, had no place to live, desperately tried to live, and still made no attempt to return to their original homes. Finally, some drowned themselves in Jilo River, which you will cross tomorrow," the old woman said.

"I understand. I have had some regrets leaving everything to come here, but I swore in Rgulang Monastery and to my family *pram* that I wouldn't return, no matter what happened in Jiloghuali," Zhualimaxji replied.

They huddled on the small platform bed made of stone. Zhualimaxji was deep in thought and unable to sleep.

It rained heavily outside. The earsplitting sound of the rocketing river gushing out of the narrow, deep valley seemed to make the house vibrate. She worried the house would plunge into the bottomless abyss from atop the hill and felt more afraid.

The yaks' hungry bellowing awakened Zhualimaxji early the next morning. She got up and walked out of the room into dense mist and clouds, amid white ribbons stretching from the sky to the earth. The river growled incessantly. As the minutes passed, the exciting natural



spectacle pleasantly surprised Zhualimaxji. Sunrays shot from above the mountain, driving away mist and clouds, revealing rushing water in the pristine mountain stream, dominating the landscape.

When Zhualimaxji was about to leave, the lady uneasily said, "Walk along the path and river until you leave the valley. You'll be safer. There are many households at the valley entrance. You can ask the way. There are wolves, brown bears, and snow leopards on the mountains among the trees. Shout periodically to frighten them. You don't want to meet one face to face."

Zhualimaxji thanked her and resumed her journey.

## QUSHIDENTANG MONASTERY

After about an hour, Zhualimaxji saw a group of people approaching. She was frightened, slowed her pace, and walked on one side of the path. Her arms clasped Layahua on her back more tightly. They carried rifles and Zhualimaxji thought they might be soldiers. Many were wounded and on horseback, supported by other soldiers, who rode along on either side. Some had lost a leg or an arm. Zhualimaxji decided that they must have been defeated in battle as they slowly passed. Zhualimaxji picked up a small bag of flour from the ground that had been discarded by a soldier to lighten his load. She put it on one shoulder and her daughter on the other. Late that afternoon, Zhualimaxji emerged from the valley. A large village was at the foot of the hill on her right at the main valley entrance. The river that had accompanied her through the valley now merged with a much larger river gushing out from an adjacent valley, rumbling into the distance, like a jangling jade belt weaving between the mountains.

Zalanghuali<sup>77</sup> Village was home to Tibetans and a few Mongghul, Han, and Muslims. She walked to a long iron-chain suspension bridge spanning the broad river. It consisted of four thick iron chains, whose ends were tightly pegged into boulders on either side of the river. Crude planks were attached on the two lower parallel iron chains while the upper two chains further supported the bridge and served as handrails.

Two men guarded both sides of the bridge day and night. They lived in a simple room and collected a crossing fee. When she was ready to step on the planks she was asked for one *yuan* to pass. Fortunately, she had the coin in her

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<sup>77</sup> In today's Zhalonggou Village, Jiading Township, Huzhu County.

pocket that the man had given her earlier. She paid the fee and hesitantly stepped on the planks as rushing water flowed beneath her feet, making a loud clamor. The whole bridge shook as she edged forward. When she eventually reached the other side, she put Layahua and the flour bag on the ground and rested on a boulder near the riverbank. Looking at the broad torrent, she recalled Sishijinsuu telling her:

In the past there were no bridges. Those living along the river suffered greatly when crossing the river and decided to build a bridge. They finished after many days of heavy labor and got ready to celebrate the bridge's completion. Many gathered for the celebration. They wanted sacred bull yaks<sup>78</sup> to cross the bridge first before people crossed.

Darima Living Buddha attended, disguised as a farmer. He asked local villagers to allow him to cross first, but they refused. Finally, he took his robe from his shoulder bag and flung it on the river, sat on the robe, slowly floated across the river, successfully reached the other side, and put on his robe. He said to the dumbfounded villagers, "You will need to make small repairs to your bridge every year and big repairs once every three years," and then he walked away.

Indeed, the river damaged the bridge during annual floods, forcing the villagers to repair it. The bridge was completely swept away once every three years. The villagers regretted that they had not recognized the Living Buddha, who had then caused the important bridge to be frequently damaged, causing them much trouble.

She stood, picked up her daughter, continued her journey, and suddenly recalled a love song related to Jilo River.<sup>79</sup> To amuse herself, she softly sang:

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<sup>78</sup> Each village had a sacred bull yak, ox, or sheep, designated by a *pram*. Sacred livestock roamed free, even in fields, and were not driven away, beaten, or killed by locals.

<sup>79</sup> Today, the Jilo River is the border between Huzhu County, Qinghai Province and Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County, Gansu Province.

Jilo River water is torrential,  
Daban Mountain miasma is strong.  
The dirt collected on your vagina is thick,  
The old scalper thoroughly plowed nine times.

A gold tiled, red-walled monastery appeared under a dirt cliff surrounded by many trees. She entered and found several Mongghul monks from her home area. Qushidentang<sup>80</sup> was well known in the Jilo area. She had heard about it from old people, whose favorite topics of conversation were Mongghul monks and the monastery.

Its location was less attractive, the monks were fewer, and it was smaller than Rgulang, but it was older. Resident monks were from various places. She piously prostrated in front of all the rooms and walked around the main building, her right hand turning the large scripture wheels that lined the walls in a clockwise fashion. She stayed overnight in a Mongghul monk's home and left the next morning after breakfast with dried bread that the monk had insisted she take.

Zhualimaxji continued on, stopping periodically to ask fellow travelers the way as she walked down the long Aijaliin<sup>81</sup> hillside. She reached another valley and found a small village where she asked for water and bread from a household, and then resumed her journey along a path to the top of a hill along a deep, long ravine. From this vantage point, she could see many people near huge piles of coal. Some loaded long wool bags full of coal on livestock; others were filling bags with coal; some were weighing the bags with a longbeamed steelyard; and others were crawling out of holes in the hill where coal was dug, pulling bags of coal behind them. Their faces were inky black except for the brightness of their eyes. Horses, donkeys, and mules were everywhere.

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<sup>80</sup> Located in today's Tiantang Township, Tianshu Tibetan Autonomous County, Gansu Province.

<sup>81</sup> Located in today's Tiantang Township, Tianshu Tibetan Autonomous County, Gansu Province.

A few inns were near the piles of coal. Hungry and tired, Zhualimaxji entered an inn and saw men eating noodles and pork, drinking liquor, and enjoying themselves. She begged for bread and money. Suddenly a man in a corner of the room called to her in Mongghul, recognizing that she was Mongghul from her black felt hat and clothes. She turned and saw two men dressed in Mongghul white felt hats, and white, patterned Mongghul boots eating bread and drinking soup from where they sat on a corner bench.

She walked over and said "Where are you from, Uncles?"

"Oh Aunt, we're from Durishidii.<sup>82</sup> What are you doing here? Where are you going?" they asked, for it was very unusual to see Mongghul women in the coal business.

"I'm from Duwa, near Rgulang Monastery. I'm going to visit a relative!" Xjirimu lied.

"Where does your relative live, exactly?" one man asked.

Zhualimaxji replied, "In Xemeri."<sup>83</sup> She had learned this name from Xemeri Madman, when he irregularly visited his aunt's home in a neighbor village. He wore a small triangular hat and a tattered black sheepskin robe throughout the year. Children followed and teased him. When he was irritated, he turned and scolded the children with curses and tossed clods at them. Sometimes he squatted naked on the roadside, looking for lice in his robe, and popping them without a trace of embarrassment.

"Oh! You've made a wrong turn. You should not have crossed Jilo River and come to this side. You should have walked along the river. Go back to the river, cross, and then you'll be near Xemeri. This place is Tansanliin,"<sup>84</sup> the two men said sympathetically.

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<sup>82</sup> In contemporary Durishidii Village, Taizi Township, Huzhu County.

<sup>83</sup> In contemporary Xidatan Township, Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County, Gansu Province.

<sup>84</sup> In contemporary Tanshanling Town, Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County, Gansu Province.

"Is this where many Mongghul come to get coal?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"Yes. All the coal used on the other side of the river comes from here. It's the finest and biggest coal mine in Huarai," the men answered.

One went to the kitchen and brought back two bowls of broth. He took out dried highland barley bread and *taligha* and told Zhualimaxji and her daughter to eat.

"How long have you two been hauling coal from here?" Zhualimaxji asked while eating.

"For many years. Our grandfathers and fathers did the same. We have continued their business," one man said.

"Where do you sell it?" Zhualimaxji asked. She had never seen villagers use coal, though she had heard that many people came here to buy it.

"We sell to blacksmiths, silversmiths, and living Buddhas in Rgulang and Qurizang<sup>85</sup> monasteries. This time we have an order from a living Buddha in Serihguang<sup>86</sup> Monastery, who buys a lot from us every year and divides it among his monks. They use it to heat their *yikang* and for heating fires in winter. However, some Rgulang Living Buddhas are stingy and only use it for themselves in their own homes," one man said.

Dusk fell. The two Mongghul asked the inn proprietor to allow Zhualimaxji and her daughter to sleep on the dirt floor of the inn without payment.

The two Mongghul men got up the next morning, loaded their pack animals, and started off to their customer's home.

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<sup>85</sup> Located in today's Nanmenxia Township, Huzhu County.

<sup>86</sup> Located in today's Datong Hui and Mongghul Autonomous County.

## ZHUALIMAXJI MEETS A MILLER

In the ensuing days, Zhualimaxji tramped among the valleys aimlessly, carrying her daughter and flour bag on her back. She rested on the roadside when she felt tired and then set off again. She begged for bread and tea from households when she and her daughter were hungry and asked to sleep in local villagers' homes at night, or slept in their straw piles when they refused.

One day she reached Yehu Plain,<sup>87</sup> a large area surrounded by hills. Its east side was covered with pine trees. Cattle, goats, and sheep grazed here and there, tended by herders. Many fields were planted and more land was being brought into cultivation.

Several natural villages were situated at the foot of the hills. She walked in the villages and saw some new homes built without courtyard walls. Other households had no front gate, only a hole in the front walls. People spoke a Chinese dialect that Zhualimaxji did not understand. A stream flowed through the center of the plain, powering several mills.

Fortunately, Zhualimaxji found a Mongghul home built on the sunny side of a hill. It had two simple rooms and lacked an enclosing wall. The family owned a pot, wood bowls, water buckets, and very little else. They had lived there for just a year. They had come from Langja<sup>88</sup> because of conflict over family property distribution between the brothers and parents. The couple had received only two rooms, a few pots, and a mule. They were unhappy that they had received less than the other brothers, sold the rooms to others, loaded up their pots and buckets, and moved here

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<sup>87</sup> Chinese: Fox Plain. It is located in today's Saishisi Town, Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County, Gansu Province.

<sup>88</sup> In today's Langja Village, Wushi Town, Huzhu County.

with their three children. They cut logs from the forest and asked a carpenter to build two rooms after arriving. The husband often took his mule outside the area to beg for bread to feed the family and returned home every half month. After a few days, he again left home to beg for the next two weeks of food.

From their complaints, Zhualimaxji realized they did not plan to stay because of the limited amount of farmland and frequent drought. They planned to move to Xemeru the next spring when the weather warmed. The husband had learned while begging that Xemeru was suitable for farming. The weather was much warmer there, people had rich farming experience, and many Mongghul lived there. The couple suggested Zhualimaxji accompany them when the coming winter was over. Zhualimaxji agreed. After a couple of days, Zhualimaxji left, despite their warm Mongghul hospitality, because the family had very little food.

She offered to work without payment at several homes; asking only for a place to sleep and food for herself and her daughter. Everyone refused because there was insufficient farm land and few livestock to herd. Most residents had settled just a few years before and there was a general shortage of food. Many villagers begged for daily food.

One late afternoon she reached a riverbank and saw five mills positioned along the river in a line. Well-off families operated the mills. She walked to the middle one, which was built on a platform. The big mill wheel was turned by water in a channel, diverted from the river.

The mill's short flume was made of planks. Near the rotating mill wheel under the mill room, the flume narrowed so that the water flowed rapidly and powerfully pushed the wheel by flowing against the wheel troughs. The rotating wheel turned a pole that ran between the centers of two millstones, down through the wood floor, and fastened to the center of the water wheel. The upper millstone was fixed to the erect pole while the lower one was unfixed and rotated clockwise under the pole's circumgyration. Grain poured through a wood funnel above the millstone.



The noise generated by the mill rendered the miller oblivious to Zhualimaxji's approach. He was about thirty, wore a short, worn-out goatskin robe tied with a thong about his waist, and was barefoot. The fine, wafting milled corn meal had turned his body white. His long eyelashes resembled snowy twigs. He blew on a fire underneath a small, uncovered pot sitting atop three stones. On the surface of the boiling water floated whitish floc. Zhualimaxji guessed he was cooking supper.

"Uncle, are you cooking?" Zhualimaxji asked.

The miller did not react.

"Uncle! Are you cooking supper?" she asked again loudly.

The miller slowly turned and looked at her, rubbing his eyes to clear them. Sweat, smoke-induced tears, and snot had created varied patterns on his face. He said something in Chinese slowly and quietly, which Zhualimaxji did not understand. Receiving no response, the man continued blowing on the twigs unconcernedly.

Zhualimaxji put Layahua and the flour bag down on the ground by the mill door and sat on a big flat stone. The man continued tending his fire then cut a sprouting potato into small pieces and put them in the pot, and tossed in a few dark colored salt crystals as big as beans. Finally, he added some highland barley dough pieces pinched flat with his right index finger and thumb, piece by piece, into the bubbling liquid.

His supper was soon ready. The miller, named He Chaoshan, again gazed at his uninvited guests. He said nothing and poured his simple supper into a porcelain bowl. Layahua was famished. She rushed forward and grabbed the bowl from his hands. The hot bowl burned her hands. She let go, and the noodle bowl struck the floor, sending a spray of soup and noodles flying everywhere. Layahua shook her hands and cried in pain. He Chaoshan grasped her hands and blew on them, and then ladled the remaining noodles into the retrieved bowl, gave them to Layahua, and told her to eat.

Zhualimaxji picked up her bag of flour, gave it to the miller, and asked him in Mongghul to cook more. The miller did not understand what she said but realized she wanted him

to cook more. His face brightened, and he began making dough. When this second pot of flat, short noodles was cooked, he asked Zhualimaxji to eat first and ate using the same bowl after she was done. He then washed the pot in the water channel behind the mill.

When dusk fell, he stopped the mill stones by pulling a lever that diverted the water. He spoke to Zhualimaxji in Chinese later that evening, but she could not understand. He pointed to a *bankang* in a corner and the mill door. He then walked to the next nearest mill. Zhualimaxji thought he had allowed her and her daughter to sleep on his bed.

A filthy, tattered goatskin garment was the cover on the *bankang*. It was very warm and they soon fell fast asleep. Suddenly Zhualimaxji was awakened by a fitful noise. Hogs were eating grain in the wool bags stacked against the wood mill walls. She jumped up and shouted, sending the animals outside. She lit a twisted wick in a saucer of rape oil and held it up. Holes had been rooted open in the bags. Grain was scattered on the planks. Serious damage had been done.

She was embarrassed and realized He Chaoshan had told her before he left to ensure that the door was securely fastened.

He Chaoshan returned the next morning. His face turned dark. He seemed to be scolding her as he pointed to the door. He began collecting the scattered grain and sewed up the holes in the bags.

Two men came and when they saw their grain bags had been mangled, and their grain damaged, they shouted at He Chaoshan. He tried to explain, pointing to Zhualimaxji and Layahua. Seeing a woman and a girl in his mill, the two men became more vicious, pointing their fingers at his nose. Finally they carried their bags outside, loaded them on their donkeys, and left for another mill.

He Chaoshan sat on the mill steps dejectedly, and silently smoked his short-stemmed pipe. Zhualimaxji expressed sympathy in Mongghul, but he could not understand and remained silent.

Zhualimaxji walked out, collected some twigs, made a fire, and cooked noodles with the wheat flour she had

brought. He Chaoshan ate what she cooked as she tidied up the mill.

That night she slept on the *bankang* while He Chaoshan slept in a pile of straw outside the mill room. Zhualimaxji realized he was not talkative and would not force her to leave, but also that he also had no intention of making her stay.

A few days passed, and Zhualimaxji decided to leave the mill. She picked up her daughter and left. The miller silently watched. Zhualimaxji again visited the Mongghul home on the hill. The couple suggested that she go to a monastery in Liancheng<sup>89</sup> and beg for food. They told her to return in early spring and then they would move to Xemeri together.



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<sup>89</sup> In today's Yongdeng County, Lanzhou City, Gansu Province.

## ZHUALIMAXJI SELLS HER DAUGHTER

**Z**hualimaxji asked the way to Liancheng from passersby. Her thick coarse sheep-wool robe rubbed her red, swollen shoulders. Her body ached. The weight of her daughter on her back pulled her loose robe down, exposing the upper part of her back which was now terribly sunburned and so painful that she told Layahua to walk. The soles of her shoes had been worn out, leaving her with bare feet.

Four days later she reached Liancheng, which was situated in a plain surrounded by hills. A small river flowed through the valley. Liancheng Monastery was the same size as Qushidentang, which she had already visited. The numbers of monks and buildings at Liancheng were fewer than in Rgulang. A half dozen monks were Mongghul from the Jilo Mongghul area. None were from her home village, but she could easily communicate with the Jilo monks.

Some buildings were under construction at the monastery. A big gate was built into one of the main courtyards; there were also two small side doors. The gate roof was lacquered and carved with intricate designs – splendid construction done by Lu Tusi's *yamen*. Its size was far larger than the *yamen* in Zanghgua, located near her village. It had several common rooms built around a courtyard and was marked with a huge impressive door.

Zhualimaxji circumambulated the monastery daily, turned the prayer wheels, and worshipped at the monastery, praying that she and her daughter would soon find a better life.

One day she was surprised to see a couple dressed in distinctive Mongghul clothing that told her they were from her home area. The wife circumambulated the main monastery sutra hall carrying a block of scripture wrapped in yellow cloth on her right shoulder. Her husband stayed

inside the sutra hall and handed blocks of scriptures to her from a shelf near the entrance. When she finished one circumambulation, she handed the scripture block back to her husband from outside, prostrated three times facing the Buddha inside the sutra hall, took another block of scriptures from her husband, and carried it for the next circuit. She did this again and again, quietly chanting scriptures.

At noon, the couple rested under a tree where their horse was tethered. They boiled tea, drank it, and ate bread. Zhualimaxji walked up and asked, "Where are you from?"

"We are from far away – Shdara. And you, Aunt?" the husband replied.

"From Rgulang. We are from the same place. Are you here on pilgrimage?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"We are here to ask for a child. We have been married for several years, but still have no child. It's said that there is power in this monastery to give a young woman a child if she piously worships and carries the scriptures," the wife replied.

"Oh, that's good. You will soon have a child!" Zhualimaxji said.

"Thank you. We hope so. There are women like me in our Shdara area who asked for a child here and then became pregnant soon after they returned. We both yearn for a child and would do anything to have one," the wife said sadly.

"Are you about to finish your worship here?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"No. I still have thirty-nine more scripture volumes to carry. I must carry 108 volumes around the sutra hall," the wife replied.

After lunch the couple resumed their efforts.

Zhualimaxji fed her daughter bread dunked in a bowl of boiled water. She looked at Layahua and thought, "They have come so far hoping for a child. Look at you, Layahua. You suffer with me in a strange place, wandering aimlessly."

Liancheng Monastery was a poor place to beg. Few came to invite monks to their homes to chant and perform religious rites. Villagers rarely offered grain, bread, tea bricks, and money, certainly in comparison to Rgulang

Monastery, where monks had plenty of bread, much of which was offered by their faithful Mongghul followers. Rgulang monks filled chests and bags with bread and grain. Bread was even openly piled on the floor of their rooms. People in her home area were so generous that once a funeral was finished, the families took bread, money, tea, butter, grain, and pieces of felt to Rgulang Monastery as gifts.

Zhualimaxji walked to the nearby villages to beg. Occasionally she met old Mongghul speakers dressed in sheepskin robes. Women did not wear the colorful-sleeved robe as did women in her village. She was often refused when she asked to stay overnight in their homes. Others, seeing a mother and her little daughter, were moved and allowed Layahua into their homes for a night and offered food.

Months passed and begging provided less and less food. Zhualimaxji and her daughter were thin, bony, and weak. They had little hope for a better future. Zhualimaxji worried about starving to death.

Zhualimaxji sat on the steps of the *yamen* one rainy day, seeking shelter from the rain. She had been unsuccessful in begging that morning. They were hungry. Layahua sat on her mother's lap, leaning her head listlessly against her mother's bosom. She coughed incessantly and was feverish. Layahua cried and asked for bread. Zhualimaxji sadly consoled, "We'll get some bread after the rain stops."

A man about thirty years old wearing a round, white hat approached the doorway, leading a donkey loaded with a big bag. Zhualimaxji guessed he was a Muslim. He sat by them. Layahua cried and coughed.

"Is your daughter sick?" he asked.

"Yes. She has a fever," Zhualimaxji replied hopelessly in the local Chinese dialect which, by this time she could communicate in.

"You should visit a doctor," the man said, pointing to a village in the distance.

"How is that possible? I'm worried about our stomachs. Do you have some bread for my daughter? She'll be fine if her stomach is full," Zhualimaxji begged.

The man stood, took some bread from a small wool bag, and handed it to Layahua, who snatched it from his hand and began devouring it.

"What are you doing here with your daughter?" the man asked.

"Begging," Zhualimaxji said.

The man paused, pondered, suddenly bent his head, and said. "Give your daughter to me and I'll give you three *zhang*<sup>90</sup> of cloth?"

"What? You mean sell her?" Zhualimaxji exclaimed.

"It's best for her future. I'll take her to the doctor as soon as you agree," he said.

"Why do you want her?" Zhualimaxji said.

"I have no daughter. I want her to be my child," the man replied.

"Fine! If you want her, she'll be your child. I can no longer feed her," Zhualimaxji said.

"Are you sure?" the man asked.

"Yes," Zhualimaxji replied.

"Let's meet on the pass by the red cliff tomorrow morning when the sun just rises over the mountain. I'll bring the cloth," the man said, pointing to a red cliff in the distance.

Zhualimaxji nodded and the man left, leading his donkey.

The next morning at sunrise, Zhualimaxji carried her daughter slowly up the path. The man was waiting, took the blue cloth from his bag, and said, "Be sure it really is three *zhang*. You can sell it and make a nice bit of money, or sew some good clothes for yourself. Please believe that I will take good care of her."

Zhualimaxji's tears flowed as she took the cloth and repeatedly exhorted him to be kind to her daughter. She handed Layahua to him, turned, and trotted away. Layahua suddenly cried, "Mother! Mother!"

This heart-rending cry stabbed Zhualimaxji's heart like a knife. She turned, ran to the man, grabbed her

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<sup>90</sup> One *zhang* is about 3.3 meters.

daughter, said, "No! I don't want your cloth!" tossed the cloth to the man, and turned to leave.

The man shouted, "Fine! But please take some flour!"

Zhualimaxji stopped and looked back. The man held a bag. She cravenly walked back to him, took the bag, then hastily left, carrying Layahua. When she arrived at the *yamen*, she checked the bag and found there really was flour inside. She soon exchanged it for bread and a wood bowl at an inn.

She dared stay no longer at Liancheng. The weather was turning cold. She needed a place to spend the long, cold winter and decided to return to Yehu Plain.

Layahua recovered from her cough soon after eating the bread. Zhualimaxji was glad that she had not sold Layahua and vowed to do her best to create a good life for her daughter. Zhualimaxji stayed a few days at the Mongghul couple's home, then wandered among the villages. The weather grew steadily colder. She no longer dared sleep in the open at night and late one afternoon, returned to the mill.

He Chaoshan was sitting on the mill threshold, his upper body bare. He was searching for and popping lice in his robe. His head was down.

"Uncle, how are you?" Zhualimaxji asked in the local Chinese dialect. She put Layahua down.

He Chaoshan quickly stood, put on his garment, and asked them to sit. "Have you returned from your travels? I haven't seen you for some months," He Chaoshan said slowly, not looking at them.

"Yes, we returned from Liancheng just a few days ago. Are you busy with milling?" Zhualimaxji said.

"Not very busy. Most villagers have finished milling and there are five mills here along the river," He Chaoshan replied.

"What's wrong with your eye? Have you been wounded?" Zhualimaxji said, noticing one of his eye sockets was black and swollen.

"The last mill down there is at the lower reach of the river and doesn't get enough water to turn their mill during



the busiest grinding time. They told me to stop milling for some hours in order to share the water. I had many customers and ignored their request, so they beat me," He Chaoshan replied angrily pointing at the offending mill.

"Do you have a family?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"I live alone. My parents died when I was very young. Afterward, my older brother and sister-in-law gave me little food and few clothes and often beat me terribly. I left home and later was employed to run this mill by a rich family. I receive nothing from that family, but each customer gives me a little flour every time they come to the mill," He Chaoshan said.

"Have your brother and sister-in-law helped you find a wife?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"Impossible! That hope has died from my mind. I now only think about how to spend each day," He Chaoshan replied.

"Which village are you from?" Zhualimaxji asked.

"Xianmi Village,<sup>91</sup> just over that hill," he said, pointing.

"I've been there. It's a nice village. On the south of the hillside there are many trees, and the valley is narrow. A small brook flows down there, right?" Zhualimaxji said.

"Yes, that's exactly right," He Chaoshan said.

The fading sun was now even with the peak of the hill in the west. Sunlight could only be seen from the hilltops. Villagers were driving sheep back home.

"May my daughter and I spend the night here?" Zhualimaxji begged.

"Yes," he replied. Later, he took some bean flour from a hidden bag. Zhualimaxji cooked soup with the flour and added some potatoes. She stirred the bubbling mixture with a thin rolling pin while sprinkling flour into the pot. He Chaoshan said it was delicious and the first time for him to have bean flour cooked that way.

After supper, He Chaoshan asked Zhualimaxji and Layahua to sleep on his *bankang*, as they had done during

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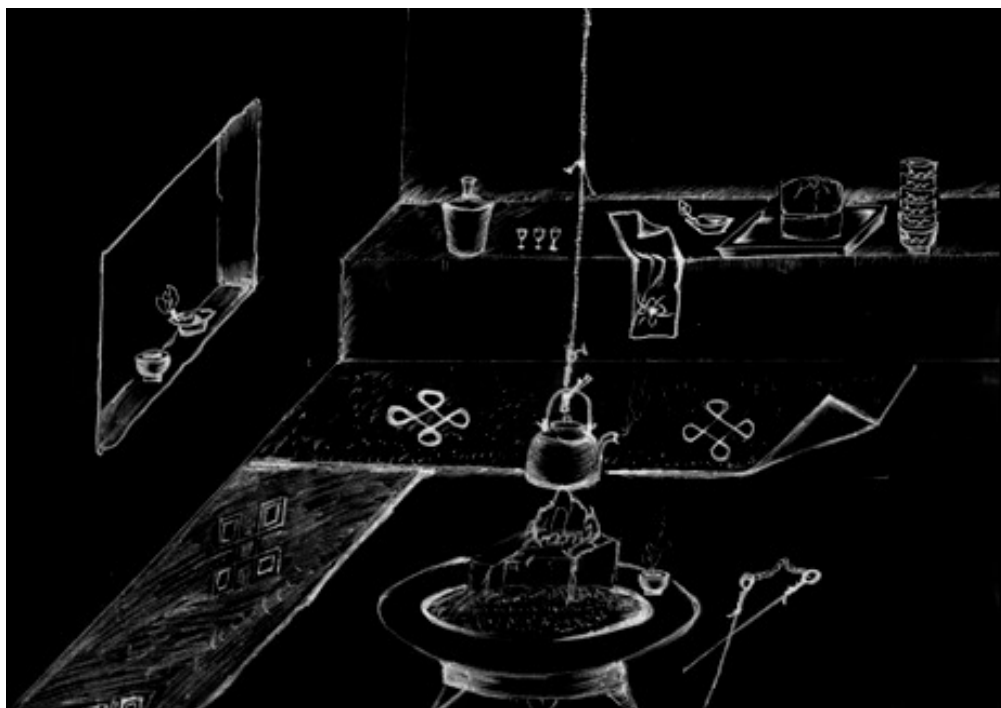
<sup>91</sup> In today's Xianmi Village, Saishisi Town, Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County, Gansu Province.

their previous visit, while he lay on a straw pile inside the mill by the door.

Winter arrived in full force and Zhualimaxji decided to winter at the mill and move to Xemer in spring with the Mongghul couple that had invited her. She helped He Chaoshan gather the flour and fill the bags when there was business. She cared for the mill when He Chaoshan went out to trap pheasants and rabbits in the forest, and did the cooking and cleaning.

The icy cold winter pushed He Chaoshan to sleep on the *bankang* with Zhualimaxji. They were soon intimate and lived as a couple.

The river froze and the mill stopped turning.



SIXTY-NINE'S SEARCH

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Sixty-nine was lonely after Zhualimaxji fled. He rarely spoke to his sisters and mother and avoided eating with them. He got up late, was absent-minded, and did little in the home and in the fields. His mind was fixed on Zhualimaxji and his daughter, Layahua.

Sixty-nine and a few of his clan members visited both his and Zhualimaxji's relatives' homes, but his wife and daughter could not be found. They visited Zhualimaxji's father's home in Duwa Village several times, but were told Zhualimaxji was gone.

Sixty-nine despaired. Had they been murdered? Committed suicide? Kidnapped? His mood worsened, and he ate less and became progressively thinner. Only finding his wife and daughter could restore life.

Xjirimu knew that it was unhealthy for him to continue missing his wife and daughter. She said to Rnqaxji, "Go to your sister-in-law's father's village again and find out where she is. Her family surely knows. I'm truly worried about your brother. He misses them terribly. Who can say what will happen if he stays all day in bed without eating? Can we be sure that he won't have such evil thoughts as committing suicide?"

The next morning Rnqaxji took two loaves of baked bread and went to beg Zhualimaxji's father to tell where she was. When Rnqaxji reached their home in Duwa Village and called from outside the courtyard gate, the gate opened and Zhualimaxji's father came out. Behind him stood Sishijinsuu and Zhualimaxji's brother.

"Why are you here?" Zhualimaxji's father harshly demanded, without greeting her or inviting her inside.

"I came to learn where my sister-in-law and her daughter are. Your family might have some clues about their whereabouts," Rnqaxji replied politely, in a trembling voice.

"No, we don't have even a little clue. You can be sure that they are not in our home. Several months have passed since they left. Your family still has not found her? Is your family earnestly looking for them? I doubt it!" Zhualimaxji's father said ferociously.

"We have looked everywhere, but unsuccessfully. My brother is ill from missing them and lies in bed all day without eating. Can't you just give us a clue?" Rnqaxji pleaded.

"No! We don't know anything about them! Your family is responsible for their disappearance. My family desperately wants to see them if they are alive, or see their corpses if they are dead. Tell your mother that your family must pay *renming* if you don't find our daughter!" Zhualimaxji's father bellowed furiously and strode into his home, slamming the gate behind him.

Rnqaxji returned home in low spirits. Xjirimu asked eagerly from the upper courtyard, "How did everything go?"

"Terrible! Her father was furious and said there must surely be a *renming* if we can't find them," Rnqaxji said.

Xjirimu fainted upon hearing this. Rnqaxji couldn't understand why and cried out, "Mother! Everyone, come quickly! Mother has fainted!"

Sixty-nine got up from bed, came outside, and began pinching Xjirimu's upper lip with his fingers. Rnqaxji ran into the kitchen and brought out a flour sieve and water. She spat water from her mouth onto Xjirimu's face through the sieve to expel evils that might have suddenly invaded Xjirimu's body. Xjirimu slowly regained her senses and screamed, "Find them! Don't let her die! If she dies, our family will be ruined again! They'll come for *renming* if we don't find her!"

Sixty-nine and a clan member asked his *pram* where his wife and daughter were and if they were alive. The *pram* indicated that Zhualimaxji and her daughter were alive north

of their home. The *pram* also indicated that an *hguriden*<sup>92</sup> must be invited, and then he, in co-operation with the *pram*, would give Zhualimaxji's specific whereabouts.

Xjirimu was relieved when she learned they were still alive and invited a well-known *hguriden* from Njaa Village<sup>93</sup> who Sixty-nine's family *pram* easily possessed. A family representative soon went to invite him to their home with gifts of bread and tea bricks.

The *hguriden* was in his forties and wore a gown bound with red and green cloth at his waist. A wide red cloth encircled his head to which many small bells were sewn. He lit cypress twigs on the square courtyard plot and then prostrated three times to Sixty-nine's family's *pram* in the upper courtyard where the *pram* was placed. Meanwhile, he chanted, inviting the *pram* to possess him. He held a short sword, sat quietly on a square table, closed his eyes, and chanted indistinctly. Suddenly, he stood as the *pram* took hold of him. He became agitated. His head and upper body shook. The small bells attached to his headdress rang. Shaking his head, he grew increasingly agitated.

Sixty-nine knelt and asked the *hguriden* where his wife and daughter were and if they were alive. The *hguriden* jumped about, madly danced, worked himself into a frenzy while brandishing his sword, and shouted, "Your family need not worry. They have not died. They are still in this world. They are west of your home. Look for them toward Wuuzin."<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> A man who is a spirit medium for *pram*. The local Han term for *hguriden* is *fala*. The *hguriden* burns incense and prostrates to the *pram* in the home that invited him. The *pram* then possesses him. While in trance, people ask questions and he responds. The *hguriden* does not remember the time he was in trance. He wears a red or green Chinese-style upper garment tied by two or three pieces of red or green cloth around his waist. *Hguriden* can identify evils while in trance.

<sup>93</sup> In today's Njaa Village, Danma Town, Huzhu County.

<sup>94</sup> In today's Weiyuan Town, the Huzhu County government seat.

The exhausted *hguriden* came out of the trance gradually when there were no more questions. He put down his sword, prostrated three times to Sixty-nine's family *pram*, ate a bowl of noodles, and rested on Sixty-nine's *pei*. After receiving two coins and bread, he mounted his horse and left.

Sixty-nine was upset because his family *pram* had said that the missing people were to the north while the *hguriden* had indicated that Sixty-nine's wife and daughter must be in the west. He decided the latter direction was more likely to be correct because it had come from the family *pram* in cooperation with the *hguriden*.

The family was happy because they had learned that Zhualimaxji and her daughter were still alive and they would avoid *renming*.

The next morning, Sixty-nine and his friend, Lamuniruu, set out to search for Sixty-nine's wife and daughter to the west. They asked everyone they met if they had seen or heard of the missing people. They were exhausted and hungry when they reached Wuuzin. They found an inn by a lane where several donkeys were tied out front. Coal was piled by the door. Sixty-nine and Lamuniruu entered the inn, seated themselves on a bench, and ordered noodles. Two Mongghul men, their faces smeared black with coal, sat next to their bench, eating noodles and pork.

Sixty-nine asked, "Where are you from, Uncles?"

"We are from near here, from Durishidii," one replied.

Sixty-nine was unsure where Durishidii was, because it was his first time in Wuuzin. "Why are your faces smeared black? Are you in the coal business?" he asked.

"Yes, we sell coal to this inn. We load it on donkeys and bring it here from Tansanliin in Jiloghuali."

"Did you meet a Mongghul woman with a little girl?" Sixty-nine inquired.

"Yes, in an inn in Tansanliin some months ago. She wore Mongghul clothes and was in her thirties. Her daughter was about two years old. She said they were going to Xemeri," the men reported.

Sixty-nine and Lamuniruu thanked them and left the inn, heading straight for their home. When they arrived, the

evening of the same day, they reported to Xjirimu what they had learned. They were certain that Zhualimaxji was in Jiloghuali with Layahua.

Xjirimu happily thanked her *pram* for indicating Zhualimaxji's whereabouts, but remained anxious.

## AN AMULET

Sixty-nine and Lamuniruu began their search for Zhualimaxji and Layahua on an auspicious day chosen by Sixty-nine's *pram*. They took a bag of flour, a small pot, and Zhualimaxji's clothes from her dowry chest. Sixty-nine thought that she would be glad to see the clothes for she had been extremely fond of them. He hoped they would convince her to return.

They boiled tea, cooked simple noodles over an open fire, and asked to spend the night in households. They slept in the open air when they were refused. Everyone they asked in the Xemeri area said they had not seen a woman and little girl that matched Zhualimaxji and Layahua's description.

At this difficult juncture, Sixty-nine faced his home area and prostrated to the Zankang in Rgulang Monastery and his *pram*. He then broke a branch off a tree, placed it on his right shoulder, chanted scriptures, and beseeched, "Oh, dear *pram*, we have met difficulty. They are not here. We don't know what to do. Please indicate in which direction we should search." Lamuniruu knelt by him and prayed too.

Sixty-nine began moving back and forth, propelled involuntarily by the branch. When he asked the *pram* if his wife and daughter were in the west, the *pram* moved his body back, which was a negative answer. When he asked if they were to the east, he was pushed forward several steps, which was a positive reply. He and Lamuniruu then concluded Zhualimaxji was east of their current location.

"You mean they are east of where I am standing?" Sixty-nine asked, and was again propelled forward. The two then left Xemeri and walked east, asking those they met. When they reached Yehu Plain, they met an old granny enjoying the sunshine by her courtyard wall. He described Zhualimaxji and her daughter's appearance and clothing.



"Oh, yes, a Mongghul woman and her daughter fitting that description are here. They are beggars. Go to the mill over there. That's where they were last," she said, pointing to a nearby mill.

Sixty-nine and Lamuniruu felt confident and walked to the mill. Someone was cooking near the mill door. Smoke wafted from the cooking fire into the sky. Sixty-nine sensed something familiar about the person cooking. They went closer until they could better make out the people at the cooking pot. A man was cutting something with a cleaver and a woman was tending a fire under a pot atop three big stones. Every now and again they burst in laughter, talking with great affection. A child played by the fire, holding a branch.

"They must be your wife and daughter. What shall we do?" Lamuniruu asked.

The unexpected scene shocked Sixty-nine, who stood woodenly and quietly.

"A man is with her. Shall we beat him and bring them back?" Lamuniruu asked.

Sixty-nine was in a daze and full of despair. His flaming heart had plunged into a dark abyss. The wife he had thought of incessantly had been found, but not with the joy he had anticipated. Zhualimaxji sensed their presence and slowly stood. She stared at them without speaking, holding a poker. Realizing that they had been detected, Sixty-nine and his partner strode forward. From their facial expressions and Mongghul clothes, He Chaoshan knew they were searching for Zhualimaxji and deduced one of the men was surely her husband. He stopped chopping up the rabbit he had just skinned and cleaned. He was frightened by their approach, by their dark, dreadful expressions, and by the sticks they held. He slowly backed away and disappeared among the trees.

Sixty-nine sat on the mill door threshold silently. He took out his pipe and began smoking. Zhualimaxji offered a bowl of hot water to Sixty-nine, which he refused. She put the bowl on the ground beside him.

"Is he Han?" said Sixty-nine when he finally opened his mouth.

"Yes. He is the miller. Your daughter and I had no place to go in winter, so we stayed here," Zhualimaxji said in a quiet, shaky voice. She did not look at Sixty-nine.

"We came looking for you. We have found you. It's time you returned home," Sixty-nine said.

Zhualimaxji sobbed.

Layahua walked to her father and leaned against his leg. Sixty-nine put his arms around her waist. She climbed up and sat in his lap. Zhualimaxji cooked the rabbit and offered it to Sixty-nine and Lamuniruu, who refused to eat. Layahua took a piece of meat, pushed it to her father's mouth, and told him to eat it. Sixty-nine took it from her, returned it to the pot, and put the lid on top. He told his daughter he would eat it later. "I missed you terribly. Mother became ill and bedridden after you left. She yearns to see you and hopes you quickly return," Sixty-nine said, a hint of tears in his eyes.

"Really? Then why did she treat me so badly? I don't believe you!" Zhualimaxji exclaimed emotionally, wiping her tears away with her sleeves.

"She promises she will treat you nicely if you return. Her condition will improve only if she sees you return," Sixty-nine said.

Zhualimaxji skeptically shook her head and demanded, "Can you guarantee that your sisters will treat me better than before?"

"They will. They have all shown remorse since Mother became ill from your absence. Anyway, what about me? I missed you! You are my only wife for my whole life. I cannot be separated from you. What a strange area this is! No one talks to you in Mongghul. You cannot speak Chinese well. You cannot wear your colorful clothes. You won't be cremated after you die but will be buried instead," Sixty-nine said in a voice choking with emotion.

"Yes, that's true. I look forward to having a happy new life at your home when I return with you. I have suffered greatly during my flight through Jiloghuali," Zhualimaxji said, seemingly having decided to return.

"I brought the clothes from your dowry chest and a robe for our daughter. I thought that you must suffer from the cold," Sixty-nine said.

Zhualimaxji checked her clothes piece by piece, weeping all the while. She took off Layahua's worn out robe and helped her put on the new one. Goose-feather-size snowflakes began softly and lazily falling from the sky. They all moved inside the mill. It was winter's first snow. Zhualimaxji gave them some bean-flour bread, which they ate, then they went to bed in order to leave early the next morning. Sixty-nine and Lamuniruu slept on straw on the mill floor.

Zhualimaxji had trouble sleeping and tossed about on the mill *bankang*. She recalled being mistreated at Sixty-nine's home, and how she had suffered while fleeing. "Will they treat me well?" she wondered. "I know Sixty-nine well. He is a good husband and a great Mongghul man, which is why I told him I would go back." Then, she remembered her oath at Rgulang Monastery to never return to her home. She was pregnant. Would they rebuke her? Would they mistreat this child? She had become accustomed to life with He Chaoshan and his unfamiliar culture in this once strange land. She had learned the local Han dialect well enough to communicate with local people. He Chaoshan had a hard life and suffered because of his cruel brother and sister-in-law. He was compassionate. What would his life be if she left? As she considered these issues tears coursed down her cheeks, plopping on the *bankang*. She pondered her painful choice as Sixty-nine and his partner snored in the depths of exhausted sleep.

Layahua woke and asked her mother to help her go outside to the toilet. Zhualimaxji picked her up and they went outside. Snow had accumulated in a thick layer. When Layahua finished, Zhualimaxji picked her up and moved to the mill door. Suddenly, she paused, unable to move, and pondered. Energy surged through her body. She turned and walked away from the mill with her daughter on her back. They receded into the distance, becoming invisible in the vast land and the deathly stillness of the night.

Dawn broke. Sixty-nine and his friend woke and found Zhualimaxji and Layahua were absent. They walked around the mill and found indistinct footprints leading into the far distance. Sixty-nine collapsed on the ground, holding his head with his hands, "Oh, Great Heaven! Please open a bright way for me. Why must my destiny be so cruel! They cannot leave me! No! No! They cannot! I must return with Zhualimaxji and Layahua! What will I tell her family!"

Lamuniruu furiously kicked over the pot and smashed the bowls to pieces. They traced the footprints some distance, but soon gave up.

Lamuniruu looked on the *bankang*, found a Mongghul-style amulet with embroidered edges, and said to Sixty-nine, "Look! It must be your bitch wife's. We will take it back and give it to her family to prove that we have seen her, that she is not dead, and that she is spending her life with another man. Though we will not bring her back, we will have evidence that we found her."

Sixty-nine agreed and put the amulet in his robe pouch. They looked for Zhualimaxji and Layahua in nearby villages for two more days. They did not find her. It continued snowing and was extremely cold. "We should return. She's no longer your wife. Root her memory from your heart and never think of her as your wife, or her child as your daughter. It's time to leave," Lamuniruu persuaded.

Sixty-nine nodded.

"Shall we take her clothes?" Lamuniruu asked.

"No, we'll leave them here. They are what she prizes most," Sixty-nine replied. Then they left that heart-breaking mill.

When Sixty-nine and Lamuniruu returned, Xjirimu arranged for elder clansmen to meet in their home. Sixty-nine gave a detailed account of searching for his wife and daughter. They discussed how and what to report to Zhualimaxji's family. Finally two elders were chosen and went to Zhualimaxji's father's home. They displayed the amulet, explained that it had been brought from a mill in Yehu Plain in the Jiloghuali area, and described how Zhualimaxji had fled in the night after initially agreeing to return.

The amulet avoided a second *renming* for Sixty-nine's family.



## SIXTY-NINE'S DRUNKEN NEW YEAR SPREE

In the twelfth lunar month, Sixty-nine's village was a snowy white world. The sun was suspended high in an utterly blue sky. Though the sun tried its utmost to radiate warmth and sunlight, a chilly wind robbed the sun of its warmth before it found the earth.

It was much colder on windy, chilly days. Flocks of crows congregated darkly in the sky, cawing and looking below, desperate for something to eat. Bare, pale willows stood upright, shivering in the cold wind and biting snow.

Despite the cold weather, villagers were happy to be free from farm work. It was the longest period of free time in the year. The New Year was approaching. Men enjoyed liquor daily while children impatiently waited to don the new clothes their parents had prepared.

Memories of Zhualimaxji troubled Sixty-nine's heart. On the morning of the eighth day of the twelfth lunar moon, he rose earlier than usual, put a basket on his back, picked up a pickax, and walked to the river in front of his village. He chipped ice from the river, carried it home, and put a few chunks on his house roof, pig sty, livestock pens, the small square plot in the courtyard center, on manure in front of his courtyard gate, and some in each field to ensure security for his family and livestock and to bring a bumper harvest the coming year.

A small festival before the New Year was a prelude to slaughtering hogs, making *booshizog*, *pansan*, *sanzi* bread,<sup>95</sup> and *logxjiima*,<sup>96</sup> and distilling liquor. Sixty-nine's sisters cooked the usual *budaa*<sup>97</sup> that night.

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<sup>95</sup> Deep-fried twisted dough sticks.

<sup>96</sup> Steamed, twisted bread rolls.

<sup>97</sup> A thick broth cooked with bean flour and mixed with potatoes.

Sixty-nine invited several villagers to drink, sing, and sleep at his home. The next day, another man invited them all to his home, where they continued to revel until they were very drunk. This routine continued until the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, another important day in the New Year period. Xjirimu told Sixty-nine to prepare the pig's head, the day's main food. Sixty-nine sat in the courtyard and singed the hair from the pig head with a heated iron rod. Meanwhile, he helped himself to liquor and sang drinking songs by himself.

After cleaning the head, he chopped it into small pieces, told his sisters to boil it, lit incense, and prostrated to his *pram*. After they ate the boiled pig head meat, he took a basket of straw to the village lane, where villagers had gathered. Each household had brought a basket of straw. The straw was put in piles separated by a few meters in a row in the main lane, set on fire, and the villagers then jumped over the burning fires one by one. The whole lane was clogged with smoke as the lines of fire illuminated the smoky sky. After all the villagers had jumped over the fire three times, villagers used their baskets to push all the smoldering straw piles into one big heap in the lane. Women told Sixty-nine to lead them in the *anzhog*<sup>98</sup> dance around the fire. Sixty-nine was still drunk and tired after jumping over the fires and declined their persistent requests. The more he declined, the more the women pushed him and then grabbed his arms and robe. Suddenly, Sixty-nine was in the fire and his new fox-fur hat caught fire. He blew on the hat several times, put out the fire, put it on, and started leading the dance while singing. He took out a liquor bottle from his robe pouch and

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<sup>98</sup> *Anzhog* is a circle dance, common in Mongghul areas, that is held at a home around the small courtyard plot or in front of the household gate. It is also performed in lanes and on threshing grounds in winter during the New Year period. Generally, one or two men lead the singing and dancing, followed by mostly women. The dancers bend over while their arms swing left and right twice, then turn while their arms are stretched in the air. Folksongs accompany the dance.

continued drinking. The village women followed him, dancing gracefully and joyously.

Xjirimu stood watching. When she saw her son's hat catch fire, she felt a sharp pain jab her heart. Her daughters had made the hat and it was the first time for Sixty-nine to wear it. She controlled her temper. It was taboo to scold or beat man, woman, or child during the New Year period, a rule observed for many generations. Scolding and beating others were bad omens for the coming year, portending misfortune in the form of illness and other disasters. She left and went home early, while many others continued their merrymaking under Sixty-nine's leadership.

The second day of the second lunar month was the last day of the New Year period, which lasted for about a month. It was time for another small festival.<sup>99</sup> Xjirimu did not go outside to watch the children's games. Instead, she sat on her *pei* and taught her youngest grandchildren how to play with cooked beans. Sixty-nine was returning from outside, half drunk, singing merrily.

"You look so happy today. How many days have you been clear-headed during this Spring Festival!" Xjirimu demanded.

"I don't know. Anyway, it's a time to drink, right? What else should I do except drink these days?" Sixty-nine said laughing.

"We discussed sending matchmakers to arrange a wife for you," Xjirimu said.

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<sup>99</sup> Families again ate pig head meat. Most families slaughter a pig during for the New Year period. Half of its head is eaten on the fifteenth day of the first lunar month, and the remaining half is eaten on this day. Well-off families slaughter two hogs. On the last day of the festival, villagers roast beans with salted soil. Children put beans in their pockets and go into the village lanes. A player scatters several beans on the ground and flips a bean with their middle finger to hit another targeted bean, several centimeters away. If they hit the targeted bean without hitting other beans, they win the two beans. They continue to play until they miss or hit non-target beans.



"Wife! I don't want to marry. I like my life this way. Zhualimaxji has killed my heart. I never want to hear the word 'wife' again!" Sixty-nine sullenly replied.

"You should consider our family. You are my only son. Our family needs a grandson to continue our line of descent," Xjirimu said severely.

"Aren't the children on your lap enough grandsons?" Sixty-nine said.

"Your sisters' sons are not true grandsons. Ten grandsons like these don't equal one of yours. Only your son is my true grandson and can represent our family's dignity and maintain the family line," Xjirimu replied.

"True, but it seems I cannot find a suitable wife," Sixty-nine said, filling his pipe from his tobacco bag.

"Nonsense! I will find you a wife, even if we must sell everything in our home," Xjirimu said.

Sixty-nine did not reply. He smoked and patted the family's brown cat. He liked the cat. When he rested on the *pei*, it sat on his lap and slept with him under his quilt at night, melodiously purring its own chants.

"My dreams tell me that your future wife will give birth to a son soon after entering our home. Recently, I have often dreamt of snakes. Last night I dreamt that an enormous black serpent slithered into our home through the courtyard gate. Dreaming of snakes surely means a son will be born in our home. It's strange that I never dreamt of a snake before, even when Zhualimaxji was here. She only gave birth to daughters. I have frequently dreamt of snakes after she left. It's a good omen. Please consider taking a wife. I'm extremely anxious to see my grandson while I'm still alive," Xjirimu said.

"Our farm work begins in a few days. We have no time to consider this," Sixty-nine said, and walked out of the kitchen to drive their livestock into their pens for the night.

## A LOVE SONG MEETING

Summer came and Sixty-nine joined love song gatherings – the Rgulang Monastery Masked Dance Meeting, Mantuu Monastery Love Song Meeting,<sup>100</sup> Darima Love Song Meeting, Xuanglang<sup>101</sup> Monastery Love Song Meeting, and others. Sixty-nine did not miss a single one of these gatherings where he sang and enjoyed himself in the pleasant summer weather among throngs of colorfully dressed Mongghul. Those at the meetings dressed in their most attractive clothes and paraded through the crowds, displaying their beautifully clad figures, or sat with others in a circle on green grass, drinking and singing. People were intoxicated from the liquor and the atmosphere, and enjoyed themselves immensely.

The love song meeting at Quurisang Srishiji Monastery<sup>102</sup> on the tenth day of the seventh lunar month was the last of the summer. Ripe crops signaled harvest would start in ten days.

Sixty-nine left his home to join the meeting wearing a round hat, a pair of large-lensed, dark sunglasses, his embroidered shirt, a *chuula*,<sup>103</sup> and a pair of *ham*.<sup>104</sup> A long decorated Beijing knife dangled on the right side of his waist, hung from his embroidered sash. He mounted his horse and rode to the monastery, situated on a steep slope

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<sup>100</sup> Held on the sixth day of the sixth lunar month. Mantuu Monastery was a small monastery that had no masked dance; instead, love song meetings were held there.

<sup>101</sup> Located in today's Donghe Township, Huzhu County.

<sup>102</sup> Located in today's Songduo Township, Huzhu County.

<sup>103</sup> An expensive robe made in Tibetan areas from dark-red, wool fabric. It is warm and durable and can be used as a raincoat.

<sup>104</sup> Wool boots.

halfway up a hill. The monastery complex consisted of a big sutra hall and several monk quarters. It was a small subsidiary of Rgulang Monastery. Many pines grew atop the hill.

Tibetans came from the northern part of the Songduo area from such villages as Baicha, Dongcha, Huayuan, and so on. Mongghul from Songduo's southern area were there, as well as from Shdara and Shdazi.<sup>105</sup> All wore traditional clothing. Some came in carts, bringing all their family members, pitched small tents on the hillside, and cooked in pots they brought with them. They were on pilgrimage to the monastery and eager to join the festivities.

Sixty-nine twice circled the meeting site and its countless participants before joining a circle of people who were singing, each with a bottle of liquor. Sixty-nine put down his bottle of liquor, offered some to his neighbors, and helped himself to some of theirs. Some recognized him and asked him to start singing with a Mongghul woman.

Sixty-nine politely declined, though his throat was throbbing to sing. Finally he said modestly, "Now I will sing with this beautiful lady. Don't scold me if I, an insignificant one, sing poorly," then sipped some liquor to clear his throat. He began:

Many plow the fields,  
But no one breaks the clods.  
Many buy this and that,  
But no one wants to receive if I offer some to her.

This brought a roar of approval. The Mongghul woman, Majii, was delighted to meet such an excellent singer, cleared her throat with Sixty-nine's liquor, and sang, holding her right hand to the right side of her face:

Behind the five mountains,  
Many seek lovers.  
One seems very close,

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<sup>105</sup> Belonging to the east part of today's Hongyazigou Township, Huzhu County.

But it is a long way if I walk to meet him.

The audience again shouted approval. Sixty-nine sipped some liquor and replied:

Many women weed fields,  
But none want to be a relative.  
Many women talk sweetly,  
But none have a true heart.

Majii replied:

Many wear hairpins,  
But no one gave me one.  
Staying at home brings sadness,  
I think about my lover constantly.

Sixty-nine sang:

Many collect wool,  
But none help me spin it to weave a sash.  
Many want hair strings,  
But no one's heart has melted mine.

"That's all," Sixty-nine said politely. "I have no more songs. You other aunts and uncles, please continue. It's your turn."

"No! No! We like your songs. Please continue!" the audience pleaded. A few young men stood and offered liquor to them, hoping they would sing more.

"They like our songs, but they mainly focus on you," Majii said to Sixty-nine.

Sixty-nine said, "No, no. Everybody loves your melodious songs."

Majii smiled and started:

The grass along the shores,  
The stones along the banks.  
The one near my heart,  
Feels less than I.

Sixty-nine sang:

Many carts on the road,  
But the way is unpaved.  
Many wear hairpins,  
But none take my hand.

"Now, you other aunts and uncles sing, please. I need to rest and wet my throat," Sixty-nine said, sipping liquor as another woman and man began singing in turn.

"Oh, you sing better than I! How did your mother manage to give birth to such a great singer? Where are you from? May I shake your hand?" Majii asked Sixty-nine jokingly.

"Sure – if you'd like to hold my hand forever, I'd like to walk with you on the road of love. I'm from Yomajaa Village. And you?" Sixty-nine said with a broad smile.

"I'm from Xewarishidi Village. My village is near yours," Majii said and smiled back.

"Yes, we go the same way home. Would you like to mount my horse and return together later this afternoon? I like you. Please come with me," Sixty-nine said.

"Sure!" Majii said.

Some began leaving the circle and Sixty-nine asked Majii to walk away, too. They found a peddler. Sixty-nine bought boiled pork, and asked Majii to eat with him. After eating, Majii suggested, "Shall we sing a bit more? Today is the best time to sing. How sad to not sing in such excellent weather on this special day."

Sixty-nine happily agreed. They walked a short distance from the crowd, sat near each other, and Majii began:

Many hold weeding trowels,  
Few wear bracelets.  
Many lustfully chase you,  
None really feel for you.

Sixty-nine sang:

The sky has many clouds,  
Few make rain.  
If you have true feelings,  
Here is my heart.

Majii clutched Sixty-nine's hand and asked, "Are you telling the truth?"

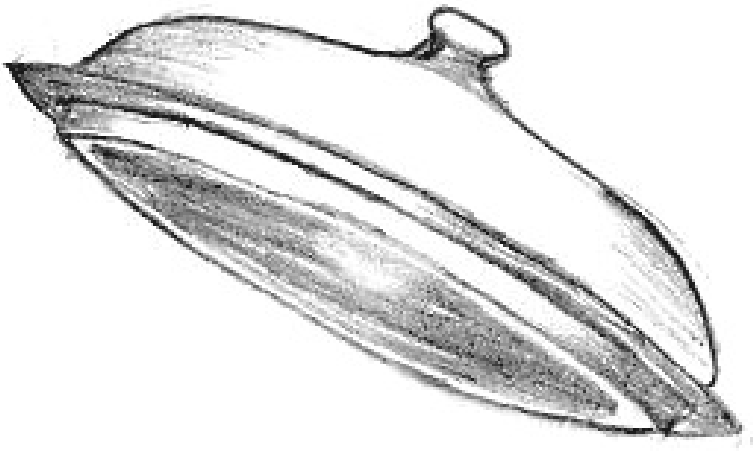
"Yes," Sixty-nine said, moving close to her, kissing her tender face, and putting his left hand on her left shoulder. "You are so beautiful! Your headdress is so elegant. Every part of your body arouses me; your sweet smile intoxicates me," Sixty-nine said, gazing deeply into her eyes.

"How melodiously you sang. How nice to often hear you sing," Majii said.

"I'll sing for you always if you care to listen," Sixty-nine said, gently tugging her against him.

"It's no longer early. Many are leaving. It's time we left, too. We can talk more later," Majii suggested.

Sixty-nine agreed. They then mounted Sixty-nine's horse and trotted away.



## SIXTY-NINE FALLS IN LOVE WITH MAJII

Under the fading light of the setting sun, Sixty-nine urged his horse into a gallop along the verdant hills. Sixty-nine and Majii enjoyed the cool autumn breeze. Those they met waved and shouted "*Ohohog ai!*" a usual response to sweethearts sitting, walking, or riding together.

Sixty-nine responded, "*Ohohog ai!*" and lashed his horse. Majii wrapped her arms around Sixty-nine's waist and held tight, her head pressed urgently against his back.

"How romantic! We are flying through the sky. You're a wonderful horseman," Majii said.

"My horse is very energetic today. It knows it carries a beautiful lady," Sixty-nine said and laughed.

"May I sing another song?" Majii asked.

"Sure!" Sixty-nine said.

Many riders on horseback,  
None mounted behind them.  
A big meeting joyfully attended,  
Sing a song behind you.

Sixty-nine shouted approval, lashed his horse, and galloped to a meadow. The two dismounted. They were near Majii's home. Sixty-nine watered his horse at a small, twisting brook flowing across the meadow. Darkness was coming. Night birds twittered nearby.

Majii sat on the grass, watched the horse drink, and said, "We have made your horse so thirsty. It worked so hard for us today. What an excellent steed!"

"It has done this because its master found a wonderful lady to love. Are you thirsty, too?" Sixty-nine asked.

"Of course," she said and smiled.

"I can easily water you, too," he said, throwing the reins aside and pouncing. In a twinkling, the two were rolling about in the open air, in the serene twilight. They enjoyed themselves as if the deepening night belonged only to them under the broad sky. Sixty-nine pleased himself for what seemed an eternity, for Zhualimaxji had been gone a long time. Bright fitful moans sounded in the quiet, hollow night.

The horse stood steady, its ears twitching listening to the rhythmic rustling. After a long time they stopped, panting tiredly. "You're so wonderful! Were you excited?" Majii asked languidly, tenderly stroking the nape of Sixty-nine's neck.

"Yes, it was nice. Thank you," Sixty-nine said, taking his pipe from his sash, and filling the small brass bowl with strong tobacco. He took a bit of tinder and flint, struck a light, and began puffing.

"Should we leave now?" Majii suggested.

"OK," Sixty-nine said, tapping the pipe against his boot sole, emptying the brass bowl, and then he thrust the pipe firmly back into his sash.

They got back on the horse and cantered to Majii's village.

"I'll leave you here and go on to my home," Sixty-nine said, swinging off the horse and holding the horse's reins.

"It's very late. Why not stay at my home?" Majii said.

"How could I do that?" Sixty-nine asked in surprised.

"It's not a problem. No one pays attention to what I do," Majii said.

"You mean you are *tulighui juuligha*?" Sixty-nine said.

"Yes, that's right," Majii replied.

Sixty-nine followed her to her home. She took the reins as Sixty-nine unsaddled the horse and then put his horse in the livestock pen. Indistinct voices emanated from the warmly lit *pei* room. Majii led him into her bedroom, located near a doorway. She went to the kitchen, brought tea and bread, and asked him to eat and drink.



The two slept under a heavy sheepskin robe that night, using their clothes for pillows.

"I have been *tulighui juuligha* for two years," Majii said.

"Why didn't you marry and go live in your husband's home? Don't you have brothers?" Sixty-nine asked, patting the silky skin of her thigh.

"I have two brothers. One died from a mysterious disease years ago. The other was sick for a long time. My parents finally sent him to be a monk in Rgulang Monastery hoping he would recover. My oldest sister died when she was very young. My parents asked another older sister to stay at home with her husband, to care for the home and look after them when they got old. But later, they quarreled so they now live separately in a new home. Thus, I had to stay home as *tulighui juuligha*," Majii said, then added, "Tell me about your family."

Sixty-nine told his complicated story in considerable detail. Majii expressed sympathy at his painful separation from his wife and daughter and said she had heard his name for some years, because he was locally known as a singer.

"My parents are old. For a husbandless *tulighui juuligha*, it's a big burden to load and unload grain-filled bags, plow, move the harvest from the fields to the threshing ground, and then do all the threshing. Recently, I've been wondering who will help me grind the grain and mill the rapeseed. It all must be done," Majii said.

"I'd like to help you, but aren't you worried about villagers' gossip if they see me walking with you publicly?" Sixty-nine asked.

"Not any more. I worried when I first was *tulighui juuligha*. Thank you for offering to help. Do you dare be seen in public with me?" Majii asked.

"Yes, I ignore gossip. I have seen through the vanity of life since my marriage ended. I want to help your family with your work and be with you forever, if you like," Sixty-nine said.

"How could that be? Do you mean you will marry me and take me to your home, or marry me and come live in my home?" Majii asked.

"You can't live in my home. Your destiny would be the same as my former wife and I can't marry and come live in your home. I'm an only son," Sixty-nine said.

"Can you often visit me, and sometimes stay for a while? I realize it's impossible for you to marry me and live in my home," Majii said.

"Yes! I can visit you often, and stay for some time," Sixty-nine said determinedly.

"Great. It's a good way to balance our families. I'm lucky to have a life with you at my home. Thank you," Majii said, kissing his moist, red lips. She clutched him, drew him on top of her, and thus they intensely celebrated their future life together.

In the ensuing days, Sixty-nine helped Majii haul rapeseed and grain to the mills and harvest her crops. Sixty-nine often visited and did whatever he could to help. Sometimes he stayed for as long as a month. He balanced his time between his home and hers, where he was treated as a family member. Majii's parents regarded him as both their 'son' and 'son-in-law'. The villagers warmly greeted 'Yomajaa Uncle' when they met in the lanes and regarded him as a fellow villager.

Sixty-nine called Majii's parents 'Uncle' and 'Aunt'. Sixty-nine and Majii never addressed each other as 'husband' and 'wife', but used each other's names. Sixty-nine came to regard Majii's family as his own, though his own relatives had opposed his decision to join Majii's family.

When Majii gave birth to a son several years later, her father named him Shdanzinniima. He was her only pregnancy after Sixty-nine became her only man. Having a son drew Sixty-nine more closely to Majii and her family. His love for her increased. Majii too, appreciated Sixty-nine more deeply in her heart.

## CONFLICT OVER DARIJII'S GRAVE

One summer afternoon, Xjirimu and her daughters decided to have a nice meal of *haliu*,<sup>106</sup> because it was raining and everyone was depressed. When the *haliu* was done, they waited to eat until Rnqaxji's son, Darijii, returned from herding sheep on the mountain. The rain continued as darkness came. Night fell. It was well past the time Darijii's should have returned. The family worried that an accident had occurred. Rnqaxji and her sisters went looking for him in the mountains, calling his name. There was no reply. They searched until finally they found a flock of sheep huddled under a cliff. As they approached, they realized that the sheep were their own, circling the limp, bloody, and lifeless body of their shepherd – Darijii. It seemed he had fallen from the mountain. Sixty-nine's sisters wailed in anguish, wrapped his corpse in Rnqaxji's robe, and carried him home.

The rain did not let up. Thick dark clouds furiously swirled in the sky. Darijii's death was a heavy blow to Xjirimu, who had now lost her first teenage grandson. She had cared for him and slept with him until he was old enough to herd sheep alone in the mountains.

Sixty-nine was at Majii's home, where he had been for a half month. When Darijii died, Sanjii ran to Majii's home and asked Sixty-nine to quickly return. Sixty-nine sadly entered his home and found his sisters weeping. Villagers had gathered and were waiting for Sixty-nine's arrival to plan the funeral. Sixty-nine found his mother sitting in a courtyard corner, her back leaned against the house wall, ceaselessly spinning her prayer wheel, chanting scriptures inaudibly. Sixty-nine and the other clansmen

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<sup>106</sup> Mush cooked with wheat flour and rapeseed oil.

decided to cremate the corpse and scatter the ashes on the mountainside.

Sixty-nine informed his mother of their plan. Xjirimu asked them to gather round her and said, "Sixty-nine has been staying in another village home for many years. It's impossible that he will bring a wife into our home. We will surely not have a grandson from him. Darijii's bones and ashes must be buried in our family graveyard with his grandfather. Only in this way will the number of graves increase."

"How can we bury a boy in the graveyard? Who ever heard of such a thing! The family graveyard is only for married adults with children, who were sound of body and died a normal death," an elder clan member challenged.

Finally, in the face of Xjirimu's insistence, they agreed. Counter to all custom, Darijii was carried out in an old chest, cremated in a sheltered place outside the village, and his ashes buried in a new plot in Xjirimu's graveyard. No funeral rites were held.

XJIRIMU AND MAJII'S SON

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One day Sixty-nine returned from Majii's home, went to the *pei* where Xjirimu was warming herself by the smoldering fire, drinking brick tea, turning her prayer wheel, and chanting. Sixty-nine greeted her, took some baked wheat-flour bread from his robe pouch, and asked her to help herself.

"That woman baked it, right?" Xjirimu asked, taking some from Sixty-nine's hand.

"Yes, she wants you to have it," Sixty-nine replied.

"How is her son? Is he healthy?" Xjirimu asked.

"Yes, healthy and mischievous. His grandparents dote on him and take good care of him. They love him very much," Sixty-nine replied.

"Of course they love him. They must! I have no such opportunity. They are lucky to have a grandson. He should have been born in our home. He should be my grandson. It should be my responsibility to care for him. Unfortunately, the snake of my dreams crawled into their home. Anyway, it's fine. I don't think about it much anymore. I'm getting old. I'll only be in this world a few short years more," she said, sighing deeply as she sadly wiped a tear from her face.

Sixty-nine hung his head. They both fell into deep silence.

"What name did the grandparents give him?" Xjirimu finally asked.

"Shdanzinniima," Sixty-nine said.

"A great name. Does the family ask the boy to call you Father?" Xjirimu asked.

"No, he calls me Uncle," Sixty-nine said.

Xjirimu continued spinning her prayer wheel. Sixty-nine puffed on his pipe.

"So this is our family situation. The line of our family heritage has been cut. Your father would be sad if he learned this in the netherworld," Xjirimu said.

Sixty-nine said nothing.

"My life took an unfair turn somehow. Initially, we moved here seeking a better life. But finally, before I leave the world, I don't even have a grandson. Too much suffering... I have experienced too much suffering in my life," Xjirimu whimpered.

Sixty-nine said nothing.

"OK, don't forget to add more mud to the roof and thicken it. I'm afraid it will leak in summer while you're at her home. Make sure you do it before you leave again," Xjirimu reminded.

"I will," he replied and walked outside.

## DANJANSUU BECOMES A MARRIED WOMAN AND STAYS AT HOME

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**Y**ears passed. Danjansuu, Sixty-nine's daughter, had grown up and drove the family's sheep and goats to the mountains behind her village every day where she herded them by herself. She was a pretty, intelligent girl. Xjirimu and Sixty-nine treated her as a pearl in their palms.

Even though her mother had left when she was very young, through her father's sisters and grandmother's tender affection and instruction, she excelled at embroidery, was an excellent cook, and worked hard in the fields. She had also learned many songs and folktales from Xjirimu on the bed they shared each night. She had also learnt drinking songs from her father on the *pei*, where he drank and sang with his friends.

Thick snow covered all the land in Danjansuu's area one winter morning. That day she did not go outside to herd sheep and goats, because the snow made it difficult for the animals to find forage. She led the animals out of their pen and spread bean straw on the snow-swept courtyard. She held a newborn black and white lamb in her arms in a sunny place next to her grandmother. She chewed barley bread then put it on her palm for the lamb, whose mother neglected it.

"Which ewe gave birth to that lamb?" Xjirimu asked Danjansuu.

"The old sacred sheep," Danjansuu said, pointing to a ewe with colored ribbons given by the family *pram*, tied to wool in its back.

"Oh, that one. She's old. This might be her last lamb. We need to select another young ewe to become a sacred sheep for our home," Xjirimu suggested, enjoying the weak winter sunshine.

"Grandmother, why does a family have a holy sheep?" Danjansuu asked.

"Your father performed a rite in our home on the morning of the third day of the first lunar month. He washed his face and hands, lit incense, made three prostrations, swept the courtyard clean, unbolted the door to the sheep's pen, and offered the sheep fresh New Year's fried, baked, and steamed bread. He let them eat as much as they wanted. While they were busy eating the bread, he held the holy sheep and tied sacred cloth given by the *pram* to its wool. Finally, he washed its wool with milk mixed with cypress twigs.

"He did this because ages ago, our Mongghul ancestors were nomads on the boundless grasslands. To increase their livestock yearly, they selected a sacred sheep from among all their sheep. This holy sheep protected all their sheep from disasters and also caused the flock to multiply. Families cannot beat, kill, or eat holy sheep. They die a natural death. Even though we are now mostly farmers and raise fewer sheep, we maintain this traditional herding rite. Once a holy ewe dies, another ewe is chosen. When this rite is done, your father and other clan members perform *lazii*,"<sup>107</sup> Xjirimu explained.

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<sup>107</sup> This ritual is held in a home with a *pram*. Clan members gather between the second and eighth days of the first lunar month, particularly on the third and eighth days. Early in the morning, all participants bring twelve small steamed buns and some colorful cloths (mostly red and yellow), which are offered to the *pram*. They set off firecrackers, light incense, prostrate to the *pram*, and ask the *pram* what they need to know for the village, household, livestock, and crops as well as personal affairs to better prepare for the coming year. The *pram* tells them to visit certain *lasizi* peaks of mountains (Chileb, Durizang, Lawaa, and Sughua in the Huzhu area) on certain propitious days (the eighth and fifteenth days) on the first and second lunar months. They offer incense and prostrate to all directions at the *lasizi*. The *pram* may communicate that certain scriptures should be chanted in the



Suddenly someone knocked on the courtyard gate. Danjansuu unbolted the gate and her father came in, leading a little boy wearing a sheepskin robe. His hair was in several long thin braids. A chain was around his neck and an amulet hung from his chest. Two silver teardrop-shaped earrings hung from his earlobes. A little butter was smeared on his temples.<sup>108</sup> What a smart, lovely boy! It was Sixty-nine's first time to bring Majii's son to his home.

"Oh, it's you, Father! How are you?" Danjansuu squealed. She had missed him during his absence of several weeks.

"Yes, it's me, my lovely daughter. I'm fine. Father missed you very much, too. Call her Elder Sister," Sixty-nine told Shdanzinniima.

The little boy looked up at Danjansuu carefully and finally said, "Elder Sister."

"Call her Grandmother," Sixty-nine said, pointing to Xjirimu.

Xjirimu held his hands and carefully inspected him. She decided that his looks, manner of speaking, and behavior were all exactly a copy of her son's.

"What's your name?" Xjirimu asked, gazing at him.

"Shdanzinniima," he said.

"What a great name," Xjirimu said.

"Am I your grandmother?" Xjirimu asked.

"No," the boy answered, shaking his head

"Why?" Xjirimu asked.

"You're not my grandmother. She is in my home in Xewarishidi," he replied.

"How clever! You are correct," Xjirimu said, and teased him by putting her index finger gently against his forehead.

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village by each family at certain times during the Spring Festival.

<sup>108</sup> When a son first visits his maternal uncle or another important guest's home, he is traditionally attired in this manner.

Xjirimu took out a lump of brown sugar from her robe and gave it to him. Shdanzinniima excitedly walked to Sixty-nine and said, "Uncle! Look at this!"

"Oh, that's great! Eat it. Your granny is kind to you," Sixty-nine said.

The terms the little boy used to refer to her family members hurt Xjirimu's heart. She was silent a long while.

"The sheep are fatter than last winter," Sixty-nine said.

"Your daughter takes good care of them," Xjirimu said, looking at Danjansuu, who stood to one side with a proud, bright expression on her face.

"A matchmaker visited and left a betrothal gift. I told him I couldn't give a quick reply, that we could only give a clear answer when Danjansuu's father returned," Xjirimu said.

Hearing what the grown-ups were discussing, Danjansuu shyly led the little boy outside.

"She is of marriageable age and now is the correct time to consider this. I have heard that The Land Reform Movement will begin here, across the whole nation in fact. In a few years, all land, trees, livestock, and private belongings will belong to a new-founded community in each village. We will work together at specified times and eat together from one big pot. I'll have to return and live at home with all of you once again. I don't want Danjansuu to marry and leave our home. I want her to stay as *tulighui juuligha*," Sixty-nine said, puffing on his pipe.

"I've never heard of such a movement. I don't believe you. How could it be that every family's personal belongings could become community property?" Xjirimu said, shaking her head in disbelief.

"It is true, and will soon happen here. It's already happening in inner areas of the country," Sixty-nine replied, blowing through his pipe stem to clear it, then dug into the brass bowl with a small iron hook fixed to his tobacco pouch.

"Oh, it's impossible to imagine what will happen if that really took place. What would befall us?" Xjirimu sighed. "Anyway, you can live with your sisters and their

children. If Danjansuu marries and live with her husband in his home, your sisters' children will care for you when you are old," Xjirimu said.

"I don't want to live with them. I want to live with my daughter. She's my child and I love her dearly," Sixty-nine replied.

"Regardless of what happens, arrange your sisters' children's marriages and care for your sisters after I die," Xjirimu said.

"Don't worry. I'll do my brother's duty and help my sisters' children marry, and build houses for each of them," Sixty-nine vowed.

On the eve of 1954, with Sixty-nine's sisters' help, a *tulighui juuligha* rite was held for Danjansuu at their home when she was eighteen, just as it had been done for her aunts.

## XJIRIMU'S FUNERAL

Early in 1956, the High-Level Agricultural Production Cooperative Movement was vigorously implemented. Private fields, trees, livestock, and furniture all became the property of a newly created administrative village. Natural villages were combined into large administrative villages. Leaders were chosen for each village. The villagers all worked together at set times each day. Many daily meetings were held. Villagers were busier than before. Their daily work system was completely changed.

Sixty-nine could no longer easily visit Majji, nor stay for long periods as before. He had to work daily in the administrative village, along with everyone else.

One morning Sixty-nine returned home after a meeting and started to drive all his family's sheep to a new village pen. Xjirimu began weeping and asked Sixty-nine to please leave the old, holy ewe at home, so it could die naturally. Sixty-nine explained that a strict new rule had been set and that the village leaders would count the sheep. Families that failed to drive all their sheep to the collective pen would be punished. Xjirimu sobbed hopelessly and asked Sixty-nine to pull a fistful of wool from each sheep and leave it in the pen to keep the sheep's fortune permanently at home.

After the start of the new system, Xjirimu quickly grew old and weak. She could not leave the *pei* and the *bankang* easily, ceaselessly coughed, and felt general discomfort.

Two years later, Xjirimu was unable to help herself and stayed on the *bankang*. Her coughing worsened. Her grandchildren helped her, after the adults went to work in the administrative village. She was constipated and her

daughters regularly used their fingers to remove stool from her anus.

Sixty-nine and his sisters returned home from work one night. They had been coming home later and later. They sat by Xjirimu and asked her how she was.

Xjirimu said weakly, "Today I'm feeling a little better. I had a nice dream last night. I've been thinking about it all day. I saw my grandparents sitting with several other old Mongghul in a sunny place in the village lane in front of my home in our old village. Children played joyfully nearby. Those old people happily chatted and spun their prayer wheels. Old men were spinning yarn from wool. My brother and several other shepherds were triumphantly returning from herding with spinning sticks in their long white wool robes. Their trouser legs were stuffed into their boots. They held spinning thread and balls of wool. The sheep walked lazily with full stomachs.

"Several young women wore beautiful headdresses, colorful gowns, and embroidered shoes. Strings of copper coins jingled from their sashes. They giggled and carefully inspected each other's embroidered sashes. They had just returned from a pleasing summer festival and looked so happy and nice in the light of the setting sun.

"I was happily running towards my parents, calling 'Mother! Father!' They were on their way home from the fields. Mother had a basket full of weeds on her back. Father was carrying a hoe and leading a horse by the reins. Mother smiled from some distance away and happily bundled me up in her arms, then put me back on the ground gently. My parents smilingly and gently greeted the village's elders and my grandparents.

"Smoke wafted softly to the sky from each household's chimney. It was beautiful. Everything was just wonderful. We were all in an idyllic place, precisely as if we had reached the legendary Xangxanbala.<sup>109</sup> Joy and harmony filled the village. There seemed to be no sadness, and

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<sup>109</sup> Shambhala, Shambala, Shamballaa = a land without sadness, suffering, and pain.

everyone lived freely," Xjirimu said, a bright light passing over her wrinkled face.

"What a happy time it was! Everything is so different now. We must get up early and go to work when the village head shouts from the lanes. We start early and finish late," Rnqaxji said, combing her mother's hair with her hands and then covering her mother with a robe.

"Now I worry about who will chant when I die. The monks at Rgulang have been driven to their homes to become laymen. How will my road be bright? How can I avoid the road to Hell without the monks' help? If I fail, how can I return home and live with you all in a new reincarnation?" Xjirimu said bitterly, tears pooling and flowing in rivulets down the creases on her face. She closed her eyes despairingly.

"Rest assured we will find monks for you, Mother. Our efforts will surely allow you to return home in your next incarnation and live with us forever," her daughters comforted.

A couple of days later, when Sixty-nine and his sisters were attending a meeting in the administrative village's new livestock yard, Durijixji's daughter ran in and said Xjirimu was dying.

Sixty-nine and his sisters hurried home. It was too late. Xjirimu had died peacefully on her *bankang* at the age of seventy-five, in the summer of 1958. Because of the Doing Away With Superstition Movement, a few monks uneasily came to Sixty-nine's home and chanted to pave a wide, bright road for her to Heaven and to ensure a quick return to her own home in her next incarnation. They were the carpenter-uncle's close friends who had lived at Rgulang.

The day the monks approached Sixty-nine's front gate, Xjirimu's three daughters, her granddaughter, Danjansuu, and some village wives, greeted them with a lament:

On this day,  
My respected mother,  
Make a white road for her.

Those from behind the black mountain,  
Those inside the white room,  
Those wearing yellow robes,  
We warmly invite you to our home.

Please enter the main room,  
And warmly sit,  
On white felt.

On the sandalwood table,  
Open the scriptures,  
In the right hand,  
Hold a bell,  
Make a white road for our mother.

Respected mother!  
If you walk on your white road,  
Your children and grandchildren,  
Are like discarded stones and piles of soil.

Your children and grandchildren,  
Who will care for them?

Your daughters,  
From behind you,  
At the side of a big road,  
We will gather your five bones.

If we do not do this at the village center,  
Your daughters,  
Will be criticized.

Our respected mother!  
As you walk to Heaven,  
White hailstones will fall,  
But they are not white hailstones,  
They are your daughters,  
With their cold laments.

When you reach the King of Hell,

Kneel before him,  
Call three times to your daughters.<sup>110</sup>

Xjirimu's daughters and Danjansuu expressed their deepest feelings in elegiac lamentations with mournful melodies, while other lamenting women supported and steadied them. Immediately, the heart-broken, mournful atmosphere caused men to secretly wipe away unwanted tears. Their lamentations lasted a long while and eventually faded, as the monks settled on the *yikang* and began chanting.

Owing to the work requirements in the administrative village, Xjirimu's funeral ritual was shortened to only three days.

Her ashes were moved to their graveyard the following year on Mourning Day, creating a small mound to the right of Dalaxja's grave.

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<sup>110</sup> This lamentation is an altered version from Limusishiden and Kevin Stuart. 1988. *Huzhu Mongghul Folklore Text & Translations*. München: Lincom Europa, 130-132.



## DANJANSUU MARRIES A FORMER MONK

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**D**uring the terrible famine of 1960, Sixty-nine scurried back and forth between his own home and Majii's. When he was free from the administrative village's work on rainy, snowy, and festival days, he squeezed out time to help Majii's family collect edible roots and herbs, the reason Majii's family survived those horrendous years of famine.

One early morning while returning from taking food to Majii's home, a shop clerk<sup>111</sup> from his neighbor village came to visit. Galizangrinqan wore a Mao suit and was officially employed in a newly built shop in Sixty-nine's administrative village as a clerk.

"How are you, Uncle Sixty-nine?" Galizangrinqan greeted as he entered Sixty-nine's courtyard where Sixty-nine rested on the stone-rimmed steps in his courtyard, puffing his pipe and sipping a bowl of boiled water.

"Welcome, Uncle. Come sit here, please," Sixty-nine said. He stood and walked forward, greeting him, and gesturing for him to sit on the stone next to him.

"I've come to discuss something with you," Galizangrinqan said and sat. Danjansuu brought him hot water in a wood bowl.

"Tell me what?" Sixty-nine said, handing his pipe to Galizangrinqan who politely refused. Galizangrinqan took out a pack of unfiltered cigarettes from his shirt pocket, shook one out and handed it to Sixty-nine.

"Have this," Galizangrinqan said.

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<sup>111</sup> Shops were built in some administrative villages during the Land Reform Movement. Local villagers regarded a shop clerk's job as an ideal, high-ranking position.

Sixty-nine looked at it and said, "No, thanks. I'm unaccustomed to cigarettes. They're too soft and don't satisfy me. I prefer my strong tobacco."

Galizangrinqan lit one with a match for himself, and said, "Under the Abolishing Superstition Policy, all outdated traditional customs have ended. Rgulang monks have returned to their own homes, and have been told to take wives. Our *tulighui juuligha* custom is included. Your daughter won't be allowed to continue *tulighui juuligha* at your home and should find a husband quickly. I've come to introduce a Rgulang monk who is now a layman and vice-chair of our county's Political Consultative Conference. Please consider this." Galizangrinqan solemnly sucked on his cigarette and waited for Sixty-nine's response.

Sixty-nine uneasily pondered. The smoke he puffed clouded above his head and he coughed hard. "Since this is a government policy, we must comply," Sixty-nine finally said.

Danjansuu was listening from the kitchen and was so frightened that her legs trembled. It was hard to predict what would happen to her, her son Zhaxi, and her father once she left home and went to another village.

"Is it possible for her to live in my home or in my village by building a new household? I need Danjansuu to care for me when I'm old," Sixty-nine said.

"I'll let you know after I talk to the vice-chair," Galizangrinqan replied and left after reconfirming that Sixty-nine agreed to the marriage.

Danjansuu sobbed, while Sixty-nine puffed on his pipe.

Galizangrinqan visited Sixty-nine's home again a few days later and said, "Uncle Sixty-nine, your future son-in-law agrees to live near you in your village in a new household. He wants to care for you with your daughter after he retires, when you are old. Your daughter can thus maintain her registration at your village after she marries. He wants to hold the wedding at Rgulang Monastery and accepts

your suggestions. He won't take your daughter to live in Smeen<sup>112</sup> Village, where he lives now."

Sixty-nine and Danjansuu relaxed. Danjansuu was pleased she could continue living in her own village and care for her father.

A week later, Danjansuu invited a close woman friend from a neighboring village to be her companion. Danjansuu was dressed in new clothes. Galizangrinqan led Danjansuu and her companion to meet the groom – whom she had not seen before – in Sunbu Larang<sup>113</sup> in Rgulang. Rgulang Monastery's once prosperous air was gone. The sutra halls were locked and only one robe-cloaked monk remained. No pilgrims burned incense and prostrated. Galizangrinqan escorted Danjansuu and her companion into Sunbu Living Buddha's courtyard, where a house guard greeted them at the gate.

A tall, wrinkled man stood by a table in a guest room. He smiled as they entered. He wore a new, white Mao suit. He had a cadre's modern hairstyle, a pen was stuffed in his left chest pocket, and he seemed to be about Sixty-nine's age.

Danjansuu immediately guessed he was her groom and felt despair. Though handsome, he was much older than she had imagined.

Danjansuu was warmly invited to sit on the *yikang*. She shyly declined and instead perched on the front edge of the *yikang*. Soon a woman dressed in Mongghul clothing brought in a tray of baked wheat cakes and offered bowls of tea to each person, and asked them to eat and drink tea. As they began eating, Galizangrinqan said, "Today, we have some simple food and a simple wedding for Schin and Danjansuu. They are now a couple." He took two small square red papers from his pocket and displayed them. These were their official marriage certificates, which Schin had obtained in Weiyuan Town, where he worked.

Galizangrinqan continued, "The groom will take his bride to Weiyuan Town. We wish the new couple a joyous life there." Danjansuu was reluctant, worrying that her father

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<sup>112</sup> Located in today's Wushi Town, Huzhu County.

<sup>113</sup> Sunbu Living Buddha's residence in Rgulang Monastery.

would feel lonely, and she could not look after her son. She knew Weiyuan would be very different than her village. She also thought Schin had concealed his real age, and that she had married an old man.

The new couple returned to her home to see her father that afternoon. She told Sixty-nine of her reluctance to go to Weiyuan Town, but he patiently persuaded her to accompany her husband there.

SCHIN'S PAST

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The next day Danjansuu rode a horse to Weiyuan Town, about forty kilometers from her village with her husband. This was her first visit. Everything was strange. She lived in a two-room flat in a concrete building and, other than cooking and cleaning, she had nothing to do. Her husband was busy each day in his office. She missed her son, Zhaxi, and her father. She was very homesick.

Soon her husband travelled to Beijing to attend a meeting of the National People's Congress, representing the Mongghul people and wearing his Mongghul clothes. A month later, he returned and excitedly reported, "I'm so excited about my journey to Beijing. I joined a large state conference. Beijing is a huge city with many people and the palaces of past dynasties. Emperors interviewed *tusi* from around China in those palaces. I'm sure Mongghul *tusi* went there. I never thought I would have such a chance. The most exciting event was when dear Chairman Mao personally interviewed me. He held my hands and asked my nationality. 'Where are you from? How are your people living their lives?' he asked. He wants to visit Mongghul people, if he has a chance. He gave me a jacket," and then he took out a jacket with knitted, vertical buttons.

Danjansuu took the jacket, inspected it, and said, "What a lovely jacket! How precious! How wonderful that you met dear Chairman Mao in Beijing and received this gift. I'll put it at the bottom of my chest." She then filled a bowl with tea from a thermos in a bamboo holder and handed the bowl of tea to her husband.

"It's very odd that many cadres in the government courtyard watch me when I go outside. I don't understand this nor their language well," Danjansuu said.

"You are so pretty, and wear beautiful Mongghul clothes. Many cadres are from inner China, and have never seen a lady like you. That is why they are amazed," Schin replied, handing her a red scarf from Beijing.

On their small wood-frame bed that night, Danjansuu asked, "What is your real age? You are my husband, so I should know your age, right?"

"I won't tell you my exact age. You would be sad if I told you the truth. Anyway, I'm very lucky to have a beautiful wife like you. I decided that I would not marry because of my age after I left Rgulang Monastery and came here to work as a cadre. Then some county officials suggested that I marry, otherwise it would be hard to persuade monks from lamaseries to marry. I'm a leader of the County Political Consultative Conference and must set an example. That's why I decided to marry you," Schin explained.

The two enjoyed modern-style pillows and a cotton quilt. "I feel stifled living in this concrete home. I have no friends. I speak only a little Chinese. I'd like to live in my village," Danjansuu sighed.

"I felt the same. When I was chosen for this official position and began living in town away from my former monk life in Rgulang, everything was different. Even now I prefer my former monk life where I wrote, chanted, and taught young monk students," Schin said, embracing Danjansuu.

"When did you become a monk in Rgulang?" asked Danjansuu.

"At the age of seven," Schin said.

"Which Living Buddha's compound did you live in?" Danjansuu asked.

"I studied Buddhism well and was chosen to become a chamberlain in Quurizang and Wuxi, the two Living Buddha palaces. At that time, the two Living Buddhas shared the same building in Rgulang. They were very kind and trusted me. Under their instruction, I composed many religious writings. My materials were used to teach young monks. My oral and written Tibetan are both excellent," Schin said. He got out of bed, filled the dragon-patterned

porcelain bowl he had brought from the monastery with tea, and sipped it, sitting on the edge of the bed.

"I bought some cigarettes for your father. I think he might like them," Schin said, sipping his tea.

"Thank you! That's great. But I don't know whether he will like them," Danjansuu said, also getting up. She sat on the bed and started sewing.

"I bought a gift for your mother, but I didn't..." Schin started.

"Why do you mention my mother? She is very far from me in Jiloghuali. I know nothing about her and my younger sister's lives. She had *tulighui juuligha* at her home before she married, moved to Father's home, and brought me with her," Danjansuu said.

"You were born at your mother's parents' home before your mother moved into your father's home, right?" Schin asked.

"Yes, but Father often visited Mother at her parents' home in Duwa Village before he finally decided to marry her," Danjansuu said.

"In Duwa? Which home?" Schin asked in surprise.

"The home of Duwa Cairang, who was Mother's older brother. Mother's mother died when Mother was very young. Later Mother was cared for by her grandmother," Danjansuu replied.

"Cairang's home! We were born in the same home! I was born in Cairang's home too!" Schin said.

"What a coincidence! You were born in that home too?" Danjansuu said.

"My family had a close relationship with Cairang's family. Because of a family conflict, Mother fled to Duwa Village and stayed in Cairang's home when she was pregnant with me. I was born in his home the night she arrived. We are so lucky to both have been born in the same courtyard. Great! Please disregard my age. Heaven arranged our births in the same courtyard, and later we walked into a home as a couple," Schin said.

"Tell me about your family background," Danjansuu said.

"My family background is as long as an epic. It would take too long to tell it all," Schin said.

"Tell me anyway. It must be interesting," Danjansuu urged, then got off the bed, filled Schin's tea bowl, and refilled her own bowl.

Schin sipped his tea and began a long story about his exceptional great-grandmother:

My great-grandmother was an intelligent, well-known woman whose Tibetan was excellent. She became a nun in Tibet when she was twelve. That's why she later sent me to Rgulang to become a monk and urged me to study there.

My nun great-grandmother's Mongghul name was Zhualimaa. Everyone called her Nun Granny. Her parents' home was in Wuxi Village, Wushi Town. When she was twelve, she married and moved into her husband's home in the Shdazi area, a place of steep mountains and narrow valleys. Her mother-in-law's village was located in an extremely narrow valley where you only can see a little bit of sky when you look up. They cultivate very limited land. Understandably, she didn't like living there.

Her mother-in-law told her to herd sheep on the mountains because she was too young to do heavy work. She disliked herding and sorrowfully wept that her fate was terribly unfair because she lived in a home in such a miserable mountain area. She fled to her parents' home, but they returned her to her mother-in-law's home. She ran away several times and each time people from her husband's side came, and her parents insisted she return.

Later, she lost hope of leaving her husband's home and decided to end her life by leaping from a high steep peak that she chose while herding sheep one day. She drove her flock over a hill at sunset and asked her shepherd mates to drive the sheep back home. She said she would come after she had relieved herself. Then she climbed up the peak she had selected earlier, closed her eyes and, just before she jumped, she called to her



parents' *pram*, "Dear Tughuan and Wuxi<sup>114</sup> *Pram*, I hate living in my husband's home, but my parents insist. Now I'm going to the Hell-realm," and then she leapt into the abyss.

As she plunged downward, she heard a bell. After some while she discovered she was in a flat place, where much feather grass<sup>115</sup> grew. She thought, "Am I dead or alive? I should be smashed to pieces." She felt no pain. She moved her limbs and found they worked normally. She slowly stood and trampled on a bunch of feather grass and found they did not break. She realized she was not dead, because old people said such plants broke when dead people hit them.

"I did not succeed in killing myself. My *pram* helped me and saved my life, because I heard a bell ringing as I fell. There are bells hung on the *pram* sedan," she thought.

She began wandering in a daze. Sometimes she found walkable paths in the feather grass, but mostly she pushed the grass aside with her hands.

She continued walking and eventually reached Marizang,<sup>116</sup> where a narrow trail twisted into the distance. She heard distant bells and rested by the path. Soon a camel caravan came, loaded with huge bundles. Many Mongols walked by the camels, en route to Lhasa. When they noticed a girl by the path, they stopped and asked her why she was there. They couldn't understand what she said. Seeing them, she cried loudly.

The Mongols thought she had met misfortune, pitied her, put her on a camel, and took her with them. Months passed and they reached Lhasa, where she was

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<sup>114</sup> Wuxi and Tughuan villagers in today's Wushi Town believe in the two *pram*, which are in the same temple built at the border of the two villages.

<sup>115</sup> A broom-plant.

<sup>116</sup> Today's Marizang Monastery, Baimasi (White Horse Temple), located in the south of Hongyazigou Township, Huzhu County, on the border between Ping'an and Huzhu counties.

taken to a nunnery in the Potala Palace. She thus became a nun and began learning Buddhism.

Both her parents and her husband's family spent countless days and nights searching for her, but found no trace. The two families asked fortunetellers to indicate the direction where she was. They beseeched *pram* to protect her and bring her home. They invited *hguriden*, *hguandii*, and monks to each of their homes and performed religious rites for her, but it was all in vain. Sometimes the families heard that she was dead and at other times, they heard she was alive and would return. The two families spent a huge sum on her behalf. Her mother missed her so much that she fell ill and lay in bed, eating very little.

Nun Granny missed her family, but she was unable to return. Ten years passed in Tibet. One night, she dreamed of her mother sweeping snow from her roof, dressed in her colorful Mongghul clothes and laughing. This made Nun Granny painfully recall her mother and village. She wanted to fly back to her home at once and felt unable to spend even another hour in Lhasa. She thought her mother might have met misfortune because snow in a dream signifies death and resolved to return her home. Now very much an adult, she bought a stout, strong horse from a local Tibetan, packed up her few belongings, and started off for Amdo.

Periodically, she stopped and asked the way from passersby and local herdsmen. She finally reached her village six or seven months later. Everything seemed strange. She located her old home and knocked on the front gate. A young man peeked out. Not revealing her identity, she asked, "Dear Uncle, may I spend the night at your home?"

"I'm sorry. One of our family members is ill. Nobody can come in at night. It's not good for her condition," he replied kindly, seeing that she was a nun and leading a horse with a heavy load.

"Who's sick?" the nun asked.

"My mother," the young man answered.

"What illness does she suffer from?" the nun inquired.

"We aren't sure. The main reason is that our girl married and moved to a remote place when she was very young. She often returned here, but my parents insisted that she remain at her husband's home. Later, she disappeared. More than ten years have passed. We looked everywhere for her but didn't find her. Mother misses her terribly. She thinks about her every day. Finally, she fell ill and now only talks nonsense, eats little, and doesn't want to see others," the man replied.

"I see. I'm thirsty. May I use your tea pot to boil water in your courtyard, please?" the nun begged.

The man took pity and thought there might be some chance she could help his mother, since she was a nun. He told her to enter the courtyard after she stepped over a straw fire in front of the gate. He helped her boil water and they chatted. After she drank some water and ate *taligha* she had brought from Tibet, she walked into the room where her mother lay on a *bankang*. She was weak, faint, and her hair was disheveled. She didn't notice the nun's arrival.

Seeing her mother in such misery, the nun burst out, "Mother! I have returned!"

Her mother recognized her voice instantly. They embraced and wept. Villagers heard the long lost daughter had returned and came to hear what had happened during those ten long years. The whole village suddenly perked up.

The nun told her stories about her time in Tibet. Her mother miraculously recovered soon after regaining her daughter, and the whole family lived together happily. Nun Granny stayed and worked in the fields alongside other families.

Later, she married my great-grandfather and moved into my home in Smeen Village. My great-grandfather was a *hguriden*. Nun Granny worked inside the home and outside in the fields, while Great-grandfather often performed rituals in others' homes. Sometimes, she chanted in her home, as she had in Tibet. Villagers came to learn the mysterious, majestic Lhasa dialect from her, and to listen to her experiences in Lhasa.

A few years passed and she had two sons. She was happy to have sons, especially at her age, and after having been a nun for more than ten years. One afternoon she was playing with her sons on her *pei*, when Hguriden Grandfather shouted from the courtyard, "Wife! Be quick! Flee! Mounted bandits are galloping toward our village!"

Nun Granny rushed out of the kitchen door where her husband was leading his riding horse; ready to flee. She said in panic, "Sons' father! Take one son with you and race ahead. I'll bring the other one!" But, by this time, her husband had already mounted his horse and was galloping swiftly toward a deep valley, ignoring his wife and sons.

Seeing her husband intent on nothing but his own safety at this moment of truth, she knew she must protect her sons and herself against the mounted bandits who were storming into the village. She hid the boys in a pile of wheat straw in the courtyard and said, "Don't make a sound. If you do, the bandits will kill you. I'll come for you when they leave."

Nun Granny picked up a straw fork and put it on her back, hoping the bandits would mistake it for a rifle, put stones in her robe pouch, to throw at their horses, and stood in the courtyard and waited.

Soon several bandits fiercely rushed inside and demanded to know where the family had hidden their treasure. She said there was no treasure and told them to take horses and mules from the seven that were fastened in the courtyard. They refused, and beat her, demanding to know the location of the family's treasure.

This lasted for a long while. Suddenly a child called, "Mother, have the bad people left?" The bandits grabbed the children from the straw pile, took them to the rooftop, and threw them headfirst to the ground, where their heads cracked like broken eggs, brains splattering everywhere.

Nun Granny was outraged to see her two sons killed so cruelly and grabbed the straw fork from her back. Suddenly, an arrow whizzed by her ear, cutting off one of

her braids. She realized she could not defeat them, turned, and ran, saving her life.

The bandits left several hours later, and Granny returned. Everything was in disorder but, fortunately, her house had not been burned as had many other village houses. She later complained that her husband was so cowardly that he dared not protect his sons' lives from the invaders.

Schin was hoarse by this time and stopped. "You should drink some tea. Your throat has dried," Danjansuu suggested.

Schin coughed to clear his throat and sipped tea.

"What a brave woman Nun Granny was! And how mortally afraid of death your great-grandfather was!" Danjansuu said.

"Yes, true," Schin replied.

"What happened later to Nun Granny and her family?" Danjansuu said.

A few years later, Nun Granny had given birth to another two sons. Because she had stayed in Tibet for many years and learned Tibetan well, she realized the importance of education, and sent one to be a monk in Rgulang where he learned Tibetan, while another was sent to learn Chinese in Hazai<sup>117</sup> Village, where everyone was Han. At that time, few villagers emphasized the importance of education. Several men taught a few students in their homes. Her son was sent to study in one of them and learned Chinese with several Han students from an old teacher. Nun Granny regularly went to the private school with food for her son and to pay his tuition.

Her son returned home several years later and was able to write and speak Chinese. He was the first to learn Chinese in his village and the surrounding area and was invited by local residents to write contracts, record data, do calculations, and so on, thus gaining the nickname

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<sup>117</sup> Today's Hazhai Village, Hongyazigou Township, Huzhu County.

Student Grandfather. Later, to strengthen the family, Nun Granny arranged for him to have two wives.

Student Grandfather's first wife gave birth to one son, and the second wife gave birth to two. I'm the grandson of his first wife. I had two brothers. One was sent to the monastery where I studied to be a monk. The other died of diarrhea. I went to Rgulang at the age of seven. That's my family background. My great-grandmother nun played an important role in my home and was well-known.

"That story is well worth hearing! Now I understand you much better. Your family is special. Many boys were sent to lamaseries. My family also had monks. Some became profoundly knowledgeable and earned high-ranking degrees. Now it's late. Please come sleep. You need to get up early tomorrow morning and go to your office," Danjansuu said, lifting the quilt.

Schin softly kissed his wife.

## SCHIN DIES

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A year later, Schin permitted Danjansuu to return to her village, after she repeatedly said how much she disliked the town and how much she missed her son and father.

Schin was dismissed from his position during the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976) and transferred to his wife's village where he built a new courtyard wall in front of his own household and arranged for Sixty-nine and Danjansuu to live with him.

Schin was assigned work in the livestock compound. Before long, his right side began aching. During the second year after the end of the Cultural Revolution,<sup>118</sup> Schin died from a liver disease at the age of sixty-nine, leaving his young wife, Danjansuu, and several little children. His ashes were buried at a new site, close to Sixty-nine's family graveyard.

An official funeral was held for him at his home by the county government in the twelfth lunar month of 1981. Many wreaths were placed in his courtyard, and a mournful song was played from a tape recorder.

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<sup>118</sup> 1978.

## SIXTY-NINE'S SISTERS' CHILDREN

Sixty-nine's eldest sister, Rnqaxji, died from a goiter in the year of Schin's death. It was first noticed when she was in her twenties and slowly grew larger. It began growing rapidly the year before she died and became so large that she put a scarf around her neck to keep it from hanging down.<sup>119</sup>

Rnqaxji gave birth to three children, but none survived. Her ashes were buried in her parents' graveyard. Sixty-nine retired from administrative village work when he was in his sixties and stayed home, caring for Danjansuu's children. On sunny summer days, Sixty-nine sat on a green grassy slope behind Danjansuu's home with other elderly villagers, enjoying liquor, viewing summer scenes, chatting, and singing until they were called for supper by each of their families.

Sixty-nine told Sanjii's only daughter, Liminsuu, to marry Majii's son, Shdanzinniima. The closeness of the families meant few betrothal gifts were given to Sanjii's home. The families then visited each other as relatives.

Sixty-nine also helped Sanjii's son, Niruu, and Durijixji's son, Rnqan, bring wives to his home. Later he built another new courtyard in the village, where Durijixji, her son, and her daughter lived separately. Sanjii was the youngest of the children and, according to custom, she and her children lived with Sixty-nine in their old home. Sixty-nine mostly stayed in Danjansuu's home and visited his own home irregularly.

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<sup>119</sup> Neck goiters were common in the Fulaan Nara area, particularly for women at this time. They gradually disappeared after people began using iodized salt bought from shops.



Danjansuu's son, Zhaxi, married and found a job in a cement factory in Xining City, the provincial capital. His wife, once the village head in her husband's natural village, was assigned a job in the Wushi Town government, despite having never attended school.



## NOSTALGIA AT RED TURNIP PASS

One sunny summer morning, the sun had risen from the eastern mountain to the height of a post. Sixty-nine completed his daily ritual of burning incense and prostrating. After breakfast, he led his faithful disciple, Jugui, Danjansuu's third daughter, to Majii's home. Jugui held Sixty-nine's middle finger with her hand. His body was now so stooped he could hardly walk up the path with a walking stick. He carried a radio on his back, which Zhaxi had bought for him in Xining City.

Sixty-nine listened daily to Tibetan folksongs at their regular broadcast time and sometimes sang along. He did not understand them very well, because they were different from the songs he had learned and sung, though the melodies were familiar. He realized that what he had grasped was only a fraction of the boundless ocean of folksongs and wanted to learn them all, but he was sure that the rest of his lifetime would not be long enough to permit this.

They had to pause after walking a short distance, because he was out of breath. His thin legs were numb, and his knees ached. "Grandfather, is Majii Granny's home your home, too?" Jugui asked, skipping beside Sixty-nine.

"No. It's not my home," Sixty-nine replied.

"If it isn't your home, why do you often visit?" Jugui continued.

"I like to visit Majii Granny's home for *halighii*. She cooks it every time I visit. It's delicious, and I miss it if I don't eat it for a few days," Sixty-nine said.

"I love *halighii* too. We can have *halighii* tonight, right?" Jugui said, jumping happily.

"It's hard to say whether they will cook it, because Majii Granny, like me, is old now," Sixty-nine replied.

"Oh, I see. How wonderful if she were still young!" Jugui said regretfully.

Sixty-nine shook his head and signaled to Jugui that he wanted a short break by pulling her hand down. They sat on a green grassy slope. Sixty-nine took out his pipe and puffed, his eyes viewing the beautiful summer green landscape.

"Is Majii Granny your wife? If she is, why doesn't she come live in our home," Jugui asked.

"I cannot say she is my wife. She is my friend. You are still too young to understand our Mongghul practices," Sixty-nine replied.

They got up and continued. Soon a hillock presented itself. "Grandfather, why is this hillock like a round, regular hill with a small, square, level place on top?" Jugui asked.

Sixty-nine paused and said, "This hillock is called Larishidang. A general fled and came here after defeating his enemy. He was very tired and rested on this hillock. He took off his boots and shook out some dirt that was hurting his feet. Later, local people heard that the general was captured and executed. He was a loyal officer and had helped common people, so they built this hillock as a monument to remember him, just at the site where he cleaned his boots."

"How interesting! Who was that general?" Jugui asked.

"You will learn about it when you go to school," Sixty-nine said.

Walking down the hillock, they saw a *lasizi* in the distance. Sixty-nine called, "*Lasizi garuu yarashiduu!*" and collected a few stones from a place below the *lasizi*, walked up, put the stones among the big pile of rocks by the *lasizi*, and then led Jugui away.

"Grandfather, what did you say at the *lasizi*? Why did you move the stones?" Jugui asked.

"This is Guadi Lasizi. I don't know what it means. Everybody should say this when passing a *lasizi*. It glorifies the *lasizi* and makes it happy. Moving stones up indicates that good luck is bestowed by the *lasizi* as one passes by," Sixty-nine explained.

"Grandfather, I'm afraid of this remote, wild gully," Jugui said.

"You needn't be. I'll deal with any wolf we meet by pulling its ears and turning it away from us," Sixty-nine boasted.

Soon they reached a pass along a red-soil hill. Sixty-nine urged Jugui to walk through the pass quickly. Upon exiting the pass he explained, "This is Red Radish<sup>120</sup> Pass. Please be sure you don't pause when you go through a mountain, because *zan*<sup>121</sup> wander in such places, and make you suddenly ill."

"You are so familiar with this path and know so much about it," Jugui said.

"Of course! I have walked this path so many times that I could walk it with my eyes closed," Sixty-nine answered.

When they reached Majii's home. Sixty-nine pushed open the front gate and entered. Majii's family dog ran to Sixty-nine, wagging its tail, and licking his hands. Sixty-nine bent over and patted its head.

Majii stood with effort with the help of her walking stick from her seat in the courtyard. Her wrinkled face lit up with a brilliant smile. She asked Sixty-nine to sit on a felt rug in a sunny place. Majii's daughter-in-law, Liminsuu, brought a small table, bread, tea, and roasted barley flour. She filled tea bowls and broke a loaf of baked bread into pieces and offered them to Sixty-nine.

"It's wonderful you visited today. I worried about your health. I thought you would not come again after your last visit a few months ago," Majii said, sipping tea and turning her prayer beads, one by one, between her thumb and index finger.

"Maybe this is the last time. It's hard for me to navigate the mountain path. I took many breaks on the way here. My legs are swollen and numb. My knees ache when I

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<sup>120</sup> Fulaan Tirima.

<sup>121</sup> *Zan* are evil wind deities that cause illness. They have their own routes. If an unfortunate person meets one unknowingly, paralysis, or stroke may ensue. *Zan* use their paths only on the first, eighth, and fifteenth days of each lunar month.

walk a long time. Breathlessness is another challenge. Fortunately, I did not suffer much this time, since I brought Jugui. She was great and had many questions," Sixty-nine said.

"How lovely she is!" Majii said, carefully looking at Jugui, who was standing beside them, munching on a piece of bread.

"Go outside and play with the boy in the lanes," Sixty-nine told Jugui. The little boy was Majii's grandson, Danzhinjansuu. His hair was in a long braid. The two children went outside.

"Oh, what a sunny day!" Sixty-nine said, lighting his pipe from a straw fire brought in a long handle shovel from the kitchen stove.

"What's that on your back?" Majii asked curiously.

"Oh, I forgot to tell you! It's a radio. Danjansuu's son bought it for me. It's amazing! Wait a moment and I'll make it play some songs," Sixty-nine said and turned it on. A beautiful Tibetan drinking song began playing.

"What on earth is it? I'm afraid to look," Majii screeched.

"Don't worry, it won't hurt you," Sixty-nine said and handed it to Majii, who dared not take it. Sixty-nine put it on the table.

Majii looked round it carefully and asked, "Is the sound really coming from inside? Are there some tiny singers inside?" Majii was truly amazed and puzzled.

"I don't think so. It's too small to be able to contain people. I don't know how it works though," Sixty-nine said tugging his gray beard while chewing tea leaves from the bottom of his cup as Majii gingerly touched the radio with the tip of a finger.

Sixty-nine sipped tea and said, "I heard some machines are even more amazing than this. People not only can hear sound but also see the speakers in a box in their homes. People learn news from around the world while sitting on the *pei*."

"Really?" Majii said.

"It's true. Danjansuu's son saw one in Xining City and promised to buy me one. He also said he saw a huge

metal bird in Xining. People go inside and then it flies in the sky like a lanneret. It easily takes people everywhere quickly," Sixty-nine said.

"How nice to see such things but it is impossible for us. We've never walked beyond this deep valley," Majii said.

Sixty-nine said, "We surely won't see a flying machine in this life. I worry if I'll be able to visit you in the next life. At this rate, young people won't learn folksongs because they watch and listen to the new machines instead. How sad that our folklore will vanish in a couple of generations."

"That's right. Many girls attend school now. Clothes can be easily bought from shops. Women do less embroidery and sewing at home," Majii said.

"Grandfather and Mother, come have supper. It's ready," Liminsuu, Majii's daughter-in-law, called from the kitchen door, interrupting Sixty-nine's and Majii's complaints.

Sixty-nine decided to return home a week later. Majii accompanied Sixty-nine and Jugui to Red Turnip Pass. The two old people bent over and walked with help from their walking sticks. They talked endlessly, recalling their time together, knowing they had little time left.

"You have come with me for much of the distance. It's time you stopped," Sixty-nine said and looked at Majii.

"Let's rest here, then I'll return home," Majii said, reluctant to part.

They sat on the path side by side, watching Jugui weaving a crown of wild flowers.

Sixty-nine took out an embroidered belt and a copper shoehorn from his robe pouch and sadly said, "I nearly forgot to give these to you. Please give them to our son, Shdanzinniima. Though he cannot call me Father, he is your family's son and also mine."

"Don't be sad. I will ask Shdanzinniima to visit you often," Majii said, taking them.

"Did your former wife embroider the belt for you?" Majii asked.

"No. Mother embroidered it for me. I'm her only son. She took great care of me while alive; that's why she embroidered it for me," Sixty-nine replied.

"I know only beloved sons receive such effort," Majii said.

Sixty-nine promised her that he would come visit her again if his health allowed and started off, leading his granddaughter. He did not look back.

Majii stood and watched until they vanished from sight over the familiar red soil pass.

## SIXTY-NINE'S DREAM

Later, Sixty-nine's legs were so wobbly that he could not visit Majii. Shdanzinniima relayed messages between the two during his regular visits to Danjansuu's home. Shdanzinniima called Danjansuu 'Elder Sister', and Danjansuu regarded him as her younger brother.

Sixty-nine became very ill two years later, and lay on his *yikang*. He was swollen and had great difficulty breathing. He was helped from his room to the courtyard to enjoy the sunshine. He was so emaciated that Shdanzinniima realized his life would soon end. He stayed with Sixty-nine, turning him, and helping him relieve himself. One night, Sixty-nine woke from a dream and called to Shdanzinniima, who was sleeping next to him. He asked Shdanzinniima to help him lean against a table and cover him with his robe.

He happily said, "What a wonderful night! I dreamed I was at a wedding feast. We were at the groom's home with my dear sworn brother, Gindindarijii. The afternoon sun was about to pass high over the west mountain. Villagers and relatives crowded in front of the groom's front gate and home. Many drunk men were seeing us off from the groom's home, holding bowls of liquor and snarling "Horse liquor!"<sup>122</sup> at the escorts. A large group dressed in colorful clothes danced beautifully on the threshing ground by the courtyard. Some women sang the escort departure song 'Haijee' melodiously from a village lane.

*Haijee –  
Come out,  
Liquor is warm.  
Clan members see you off,  
Quickly! Quickly!*

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<sup>122</sup> Shdaqang.



*Haijee –*  
Come out,  
There's a warm seat,  
Wives and children await your return,  
Quickly! Quickly!

The escorts wore fox-fur hats, sheepskin robes, and boots. They offered us bowl after bowl of liquor. We drank, and then leapt on our readied horses and began racing on the level fields near their village. Gindindarijii and I were in the lead, followed by more than thirty escorts. Once we were some distance away, we turned and headed back to the groom's front gate and asked to drink more horse-riding liquor.

After we drank more, we raced away. When we reached the village outskirts, we turned, and raced back to the gate for our third horse-riding liquor, and drank as much as possible.

The final time we left the village, I was racing in front. Gindindarijii shouted, "Take it! Brother!" and threw me a bottle. I caught it and drank a big mouthful; then tossed it back to him. He caught it, turned his face up, and poured all the remaining liquor down his throat. A multitude of horses were galloping over the fields, like countless warriors rushing to battle, kicking up clouds of dust. Those watching shouted, "Horse Liquor! Horse Liquor!" at us again and again.

What a spectacular scene! It was the most exciting experience I've ever had!" Sixty-nine said, a proud smile crossing his broken, weak face.

"Yes, truly amazing! What you described is the most interesting and important part of a wedding. Many Mongghul men are proud to attend even one such splendid wedding in their lives," Shdanzinniima said.

Sixty-nine was uncomfortable and asked Shdanzinniima to help him return to his *yikang* again. At noon, beams of sunlight streamed through the big window and shone above Sixty-nine's head.

"Shdanzinniima, please move me outside," Sixty-nine said.

"Sure. It's good for you to be in the sun outside," Shdanzinniima replied, picked Sixty-nine up in his arms, took him out into the upper courtyard, and softly placed him on felt, spread out in a sunny place. While Shdanzinniima held Sixty-nine upright, Danjansuu spooned cooling tea into his mouth to dampen his parched lips.

"I'm fine now," Sixty-nine said and asked Danjansuu to move the spoon away. He struggled to look into the distance. He gestured to Shdanzinniima to lift him up so that he could see better.

Shdanzinniima raised Sixty-nine, and Danjansuu supported his head. Sixty-nine gazed at the mountain ranges and at the familiar winding path leading to Majii's village. He had walked that path countless times, passing Larishidang Hill, Guadi Lasizi, and Red Turnip Pass until he reached Majii's home, where he had happily spent much of his life. It was a home he loved wholeheartedly. He thought, "Maybe Majii is gazing at my home, standing on the platform in front of her courtyard, chanting *O manii banii huang* for me."

Sixty-nine closed his eyes a few minutes later, and said, "Your mother is surely missing you. You should go home soon. Thank you for taking such good care of me."

"I owe you this. Mother is surely thinking about you now," Shdanzinniima replied.

Danjansuu lowered her head, sobbing, wiping away tears with a robe sleeve.

"May I put you back on the *yikang* now?" Shdanzinniima asked.

Sixty-nine nodded, held Danjansuu's hand, and said weakly without opening his eyes, "Dear Daughter, visit your mother in Jiloghuali when you can."

"I will visit her," Danjansuu answered.

Around supptime, Sixty-nine asked Shdanzinniima and Danjansuu to send him to Sanjii's home where he thought he should leave the world. It would be an improper, disgraceful death if he died in Danjansuu's home, because she was his daughter.

Shortly after Sixty-nine returned to his old courtyard, he closed his eyes forever. It was 1983. He was seventy-five. Durijixji, Sanjii, and Danjansuu were with him as he died and closed his eyes for the last time. All that he had seen had disappeared or was rapidly disappearing – eyes closed at last on a world that remained nowhere else.

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Danjansuu took steamed buns and other mourning gifts to Sanjii's front gate, where she was received with lamentation songs by Sanjii and Durijixji's children and daughters-in-law. Danjansuu burst into her own lamentation for her dead father while supported and steadied by Sanjii and Durijixji's daughters-in-law:

When I reach the big lane,  
It is deserted,  
My seventy-five year-old father!

Not only is the home empty,  
When entering the main room,  
The warm *pei* is empty.

My seventy-five year-old father,  
You are on the floor of a cold room,  
Made of sandalwood.

My seventy-five-year-old father,  
A few days ago,  
When I came home,  
Your warmly welcomed me.

With gentle words,  
Greeted me with warm hands.

On this day,  
At the great mountain foot,  
When I came home,  
You welcomed me with tears in your eyes.

My seventy-five-year-old father,  
Days before,  
You walked with your sandalwood walking stick,  
To the great mountain's foot,  
Concerned about me,  
Came to my home.

My seventy-five year-old father,  
If I lost my needle,  
I found it with a bright light.

My seventy-five-year-old father,  
Losing you,  
Is like the sky and earth shaking,  
I cannot see you.

Some boys ran in and reported that the maternal uncle was coming. All the mourners scurried outside and knelt in rows along the two sides of the lane leading to Sanjii's front gate.

Several old men helped a teenage boy dismount and escorted him to the most important seat, the others following behind. Their mourning gifts were taken by men from Sanjii's home. As the boy, clad in a sheepskin, walked before the kneeling, mourning people, women lamented:

On this very day,  
Have you come,  
Master of his bones,  
For my old father?

Respectable man,  
Worriedly came here,  
We unworthy daughters and granddaughters,  
With warm faces,  
Receive you quickly.

Who will we turn to?  
Who will we talk to?  
If we talk to the blue sky,

The blue sky is high,  
If we talk to the black earth,  
The black earth is hard.

From this day,  
Within five days,  
We will think of you,  
Expressionless as a brick.

From this day,  
Daughters and granddaughters,  
On hot summer days,  
Our lips will split,  
During cold winter,  
Our red flesh will be exposed.

Your daughters and granddaughters,  
Will have children, your incarnations,  
If we have more children,  
We unworthy daughters and granddaughters,  
Will regard them as you, our respected father.



DURIJIXJI DIES

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Durijixji was very old in 1985. She had heard much about sacred Wutai<sup>123</sup> Mountain from Mongghul monks. She told her son that she yearned to visit on pilgrimage, but she was never able to go. Half her cremated ashes were buried in her family graveyard the year she died, and the other half were kept in her home until the winter of 2004 when her filial son, Rnqan, ultimately succeeded in going to Wutai Mountain and piously scattered his mother's remaining ashes.

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<sup>123</sup> Located in today's Shanxi Province.

ZHUALIMAXJI'S REGRET

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That snowy winter night long ago, Zhualimaxji had escaped from the mill with her daughter Layahua rather than return home with her husband, Sixty-nine. Later, she returned to the mill and lived with He Chaoshan when she was certain Sixty-nine and his partner would not return.

One morning of the next Spring, she heard someone calling her from outside in Mongghul, "Aunt! Aunt! Please come outside!"

Zhualimaxji looked outside and saw the Mongghul couple with their three children leading a mule loaded with pots and cooking utensils. "You said you would go to Xemeri with us. Will you go with us now? It's an ideal place for farming. The weather is much better than here. Many Mongghul have already settled there," the man persuaded.

Zhualimaxji had promised to go with the family once winter had passed. But she had changed her mind and decided to stay with He Chaoshan.

"Uncle and Aunt, I have spent the cold winter days on this man's *bankang*. He gave me food, is kind, and treats me and my daughter well. I will not leave him," Zhualimaxji said.

"Please find us in Xemeri later, if you do come," the Mongghul couple said and left. Thereafter, Zhualimaxji lived at the mill with her daughter and helped He Chaoshan with milling and cooking. They were a family.

Later, during the Great Leap Forward, another man was appointed to manage the mill by the new village leadership. He Chaoshan and Zhualimaxji then lived in a household in He Chaoshan's home village. They had four rooms and were officially registered as a couple.

Owing to Zhualimaxji's experience in farming she was chosen to become a village leader and instructed

villagers in farming skills and how to improve crop yields. The villagers lacked much basic farming knowledge. Zhualimaxji taught how to burn soil to use as fertilizer. Once the harvest was done, the land had to be trampled by livestock when it was wet from rain, then they waited for the trampled earth to turn hard under the sunshine. After the sun shone for some days, the villagers shoveled the surface into bricks and turned them to be further exposed to the sunshine. Some days later, they stacked the sun-dried earth bricks in the center of the field in a big pile. Livestock dung and straw were put inside the pile of bricks. Several holes were made at the bottom part of the pile allowing for ventilation as the dung and straw burned. After they had smoldered for two to three days, the bricks became red and soft, and were then pounded into ash, which was piled up to be used the next planting season. At plowing time, the villagers put the ash in baskets, carried them to the fields and spread them before plowing and seeding.

The work of burning dirt to make fertilizer was complex and difficult. Under Zhualimaxji's instruction, local villagers soon learned, and their village crop yields increased. Her skills were soon extended to neighboring villages. She was praised by commune officials. Zhualimaxji had an important village leadership position for four years. Local villagers sincerely called her 'He'<sup>124</sup> Family Aunty'.

She had three daughters with He Chaoshan. She wanted a son, but this did not come to pass. Later, Layahua and another two daughters married men in neighboring villages, while the youngest daughter stayed at home with her own husband – a man from the same village. He Chaoshan died when Zhualimaxji was in her sixties. Later, Zhualimaxji had one grandson and three granddaughters.

In February 2004, Limusishiden, Jugui, and Jugui's mother, Danjansuu, visited Zhualimaxji at her home in Xianmi Village, Saishisi Town, Tianzhu Tibetan Autonomous County, Gansu Province. The village had about fifty households and was located in a narrow, remote valley. We asked some villagers and found Zhualimaxji's home at

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<sup>124</sup> Her husband's family name was 'He'.



the north end of the village at the end of a long lane. We walked into her home through a simple gate that had no roof. Two rooms were in the yard. We were invited into their guest room.

Zhualimaxji sat on a bed, wrapped in warm clothes and leaning against a quilt. Deep hollows circled her eyes, lined with secretion and tears. Her daughters had come to help her because her health had worsened.

She was eighty-seven and had been ill for several months and needed help when she went outside to relieve herself. She was delighted to learn that her daughter, Danjansuu, had come. She said weakly in Mongghul, "I hoped to see you before I died. It's so good to see you."

"How are you, Mother?" Danjansuu said.

"I'm still alive. I think I will die every day, but Hell still has not summoned me," Zhualimaxji said.

"Why do you talk that way? It's nice to live with your family. We all hope you will live longer," Danjansuu said, holding her mother's hand.

"It's enough to live to be this old. I cannot care for myself any longer. My living creates many problems for everyone," she said.

After eating, Limusishiden and Jugui asked about her life with Sixty-nine and coming to Tianzhu. Limusishiden recorded the interview on an audio recorder, while Jugui videotaped it.

Seeing her gray, sparse hair braided in the Mongghul way, Limusishiden asked, "Granny, why do you keep your hair in the Mongghul style?"

"A Mongghul woman cannot easily change her hairstyle. Some suggested I cut it short, but I did not. I'm afraid of offending the Kitchen God. Misfortune would befall us if I cut it," Zhualimaxji said.

"Do you still believe the Kitchen God is here?" Limusishiden asked.

"Yes. I drew the Kitchen God on the wall," she said.

"You still speak Mongghul perfectly. Did you ever feel you would forget Mongghul after living here for more than sixty years?" Limusishiden asked.

"How could I forget? I would not forget it if I lived another sixty years," she said.

During the dialogue she used a few words Limusishiden and Jugui did not understand because they had been lost over the years in Huzhu.

"Can you sing Mongghul songs or tell some folktales?" they asked.

"I used to. I learned many when I was young, but I have forgotten them," Zhualimaxji said.

"Did you keep your Mongghul clothes?" Limusishiden asked.

"I kept them for many years and then I decided to burn them a couple of years ago, before I left this world. There are no other Mongghul in this village. Who would have known what to do with them?" she said.

"Did you ever wear them here?" we asked.

"Not even once," Zhualimaxji said.

"Did you miss the place where you were born?" we asked.

"Of course. I'm going to the other world soon, so I no longer think about it. It was never really possible to return. Several years ago when I was still able to walk well, I very much wanted to go there. When I felt depressed, I climbed the mountain behind my village and gazed at my ancestral home. I wanted to fly there. I'm sorry I never visited Xining," she said despondently.

They asked no more due to her poor health. They were lucky to have met her and to have learned as much as they did.

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Danjansuu received a phone call a month later. Zhualimaxji had died several days earlier and had been buried in a coffin according to local custom. Danjansuu felt very sad, went to Rgulang, and gave some money to the monks. She asked them to chant scriptures for her mother's smooth transition to the next incarnation.

## PHOTOGRAPHS

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Figure One. A traditional mill (Limusishiden, Zangxi Village, Wushi Town, 1991).

Figure Two. Jugui and Limusishiden's wedding. When the bride, Jugui, was taken to the groom's, Limusishiden, home the couple made three prostrations – one to Great Heaven, one to all the deities, and one to the emperor, the groom's parents, and elders of the groom's side (Limudanzhuu, Tughuan Village, Danma Town, the sixth day of the first lunar month, 1996).

Figure Three. Yomajaa Natural Village, Wushi Town is located near the Zhamaqii Mountains (Limusishiden, 2006).

Figure Four. Jugui (left) with her daughter, Liminsuu. She is with Limusishiden's brothers' wives in Limusishiden's home in Tughuan Village, Danma Town (Limusishiden, 2001).

Figure Five. Escorts sit on straw in a circle at a Mongghul wedding in the groom's home's courtyard. Tables consist of planks (Limusishiden, Foorijang Village, Wushi Town, Lunar New Year, 2001).

Figure Six. Galazang (b. 1928, second from the left) was one of three people in his village able to speak Mongghul. Qishisan (name = Seventy-three, left, b. 1945) could sing a few fragments of Mongghul songs in Mongghul but did not know what they meant. He was unable to speak any Mongghul. The woman was Galazang's wife (Han Chinese, name and birth date unknown). A brazier was used for heat (Jugui, Sunbu Village, Xunrang Township, Datong Hui and Mongghul Autonomous County, Lunar New Year, 2001).

Figure Seven. The Wariwa Xmerila 'Thanking the Matchmakers' Ritual is performed by singing and an oration in the courtyard of the groom's home by both the groom and bride's sides before a fire is lit. A table is placed before the matchmakers when the

matchmakers and escorts enter the groom's home. Bolts of cloth are put around the two matchmakers' necks in gratitude (Jugui, Foorijang Village, Wushi Town, Lunar New Year, 2001).

Figure Eight. Shdanzinniima and his son, Danzhinjansuu in front of his home in Xewarishidi Village, Songduo Township (Limusishiden, September, 2009).

Figure Nine. Zankang Temple, Rgulang Lamasery is the palace for Foorigisigari or Baghari King, who struggles against the Tibetan hero, Gesar Rjewu of Ling. It is strictly taboo for those who venerate Zankang to sing Gesar songs and display his pictures inside or outside their homes and temples (Limusishiden, September 2009).

Figure Ten. A fresco on the wall inside Zankang Temple depicts a general of the Baghari King (Limusishiden, Rgulang Lamasery, September, 2009).

Figure Eleven. A fresco on the wall inside Zankang Temple depicts Dudumu (Limusishiden, Rgulang Lamasery, September, 2009).

Figure Twelve. Rgulang Lamasery (Limusishiden, September 2009).

Figure Thirteen. Danjansuu's home, Yomajaa Natural Village, Wushi Town (Limusishiden, September 2009).

Figure Fourteen. Sanjii and her son, Niruu, on the home *pei* (Yomajaa Natural Village, Wushi Town, September 2009).

Figure Fifteen. A traditional front gate with a single room above where the housemaster slept to prevent robberies (Limusishiden, Wughuang Village, Wushi Town, September 2009).

Figure Sixteen. A traditional two-floor wood home (Limusishiden, Wughuang Village, Wushi Town, September, 2009).

Figure Seventeen. Duriijixji and her son, Rnqan, at Hgunbin (Ta'er) Monastery in 1987.

Figure Eighteen. Zhaxi (left) and Rnqan. This photo was taken in Zhaxi's home in the summer of 1961 by a visiting commercial photographer.

- Figure Nineteen. Danjansuu and Schin in a photography studio in 1961, Weiyuan Town when Danjansuu visited Schin in Weiyuan Town who, at that time, was an official of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference in Huzhu County.
- Figure Twenty. Sixty-nine at his home in Yomajaa Natural Village, Wushi Town in the summer of 1981 (visiting commercial photographer).
- Figure Twenty-one. A kitchen *pei* divided into two parts by the *langang* or low wall. The first part was where cooking took place, and the other half was the *pei*, or a raised platform. The *pei* was where all the family slept at night and entertained guests with food, liquor, and conversation (Limusishiden, Sanjii's home, Yomajaa Natural Village, Wushi Town, September 2009).
- Figure Twenty-two. Two Mongghul women at Rgulang Monastery (Jugui, 1997).
- Figure Twenty-three. Two Mongghul women at Rgulang Lamasery (Jugui, summer 2005).
- Figure Twenty-four. Embroidered Mongghul shoes such as these were almost never seen in 2009 (Jugui, Rgulang Monastery, 1997).
- Figure Twenty-five. Young Mongghul women, Wayog Village, Wushi Town (Jugui, 2005).
- Figure Twenty-six. Mongghul women at Rgulang Monastery (Jugui, 2005).
- Figure Twenty-seven. White felt hats were almost never seen in 2009 (Jugui, Rgulang Monastery, 1997).
- Figure Twenty-eight. Mongghul *anzhog* dance (Limusishiden, Janba Village, Danma Town, 2004).
- Figure Twenty-nine. A matchmaker wears a *laxjang* 'coarse wool gown' and *dalen* 'shoulder bag' (Jugui, Limusishiden's home, Tughuan Village, Lunar New Year, 2004).
- Figure Thirty. Bridge escorts at a wedding sit in the courtyard (Limusishiden, Danjansirang's wedding, Tughuan Village, Danma Town, Lunar New Year, 2004).

Figure Thirty-one. Lambskin hats worn by men that are said to be inspired by Qing soldier's hats (Jugui, Limusishiden's home, Tughuan Village, Lunar New Year, 2004).

Figure Thirty-two. Two Mongghul men (Jugui, Limusishiden's home, Tughuan Village, Danma Town, Lunar New Year, 2004).

Figure Thirty-three. Performance (Limusishiden, Qasizi Village, Donggou Township, 1997).





























































青海塔尔寺  
1987年 由影

























































## MAPS

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Map One. Duluun Lunkuang (no township boundaries).

Map Two. Duluun Lunkuang (with township boundaries).

Map Three. Huzhu Mongghul (Tu) Autonomous County in Qinghai Province.<sup>125</sup>

### KEY TO MAPS ONE AND TWO

(1) Wushi Town (2) Honyazigou Township (3) Songduo Township (4) Danma Town (5) Halazhigou Township (6) Donggou Township (7) Dongshan Township (8) Weiyuan Region (9) Taizi Town (10) Wufeng Town (11) Nanmengxia Town (12) Donghe Township (13) Tangchuan Town (14) Xishan Township (15) Caijiabu Township (16) Gaozhai Town (17) Jiading Town (18) Bazha Town (19) Biantan Township (20) Linchuan Township, (21) Shuangshu Township Huzhu Mongghul Autonomous County (22) Dongxia Township, Datong Hui and Mongghul Autonomous County (23) Dala Mongghul Township, Ledu County

Fulaan Nara is on the right of the heavy black vertical line (center, Map One, dotted in Map Two) – Haliqi is on the left. The heavier black line that is vertical on the left and horizontal on the right is the Lanxi Expressway that runs between Xining and Lanzhou.

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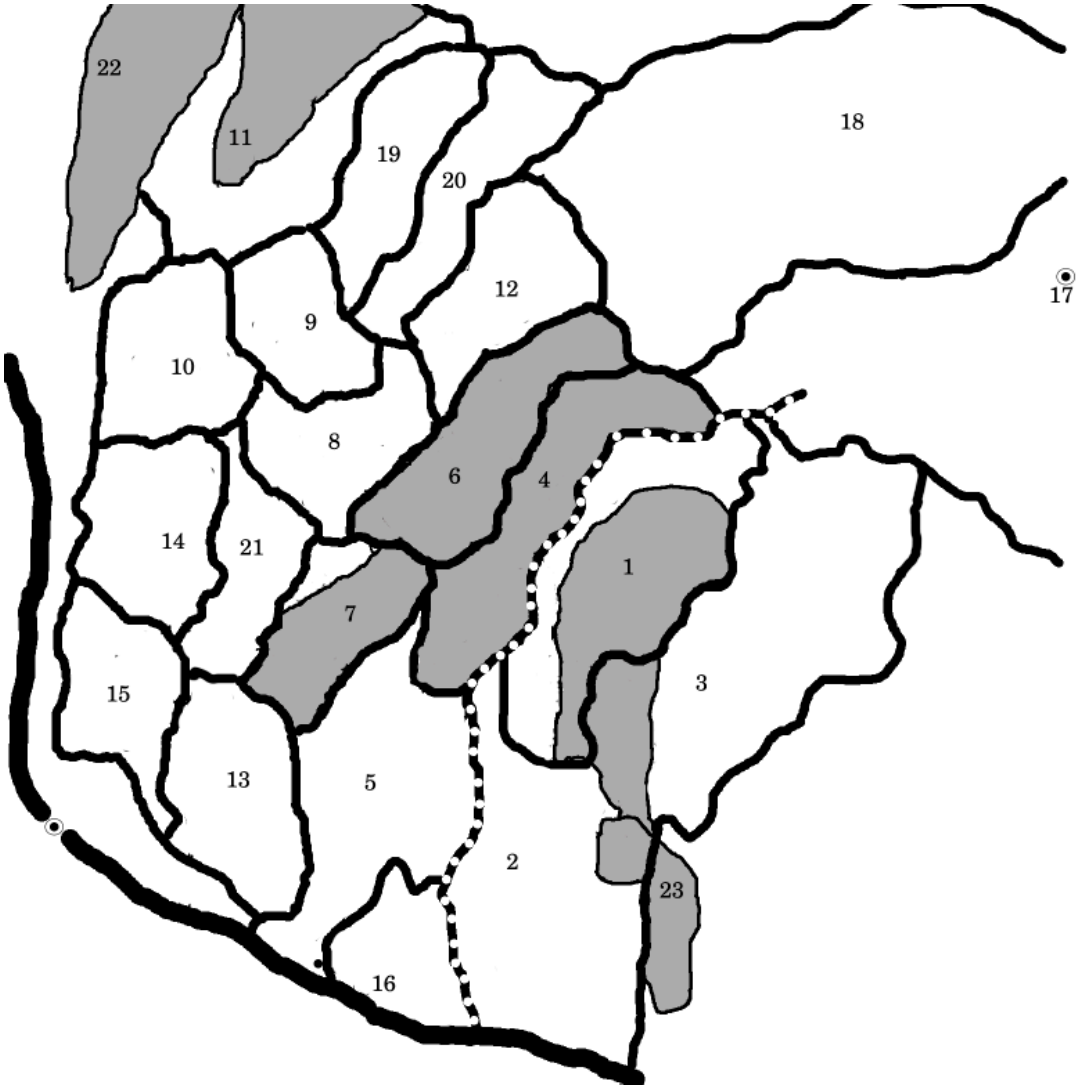
<sup>125</sup> This map was created by Wikimedia user Croquant (<http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/User:Croquant>) and is used under a Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported license.



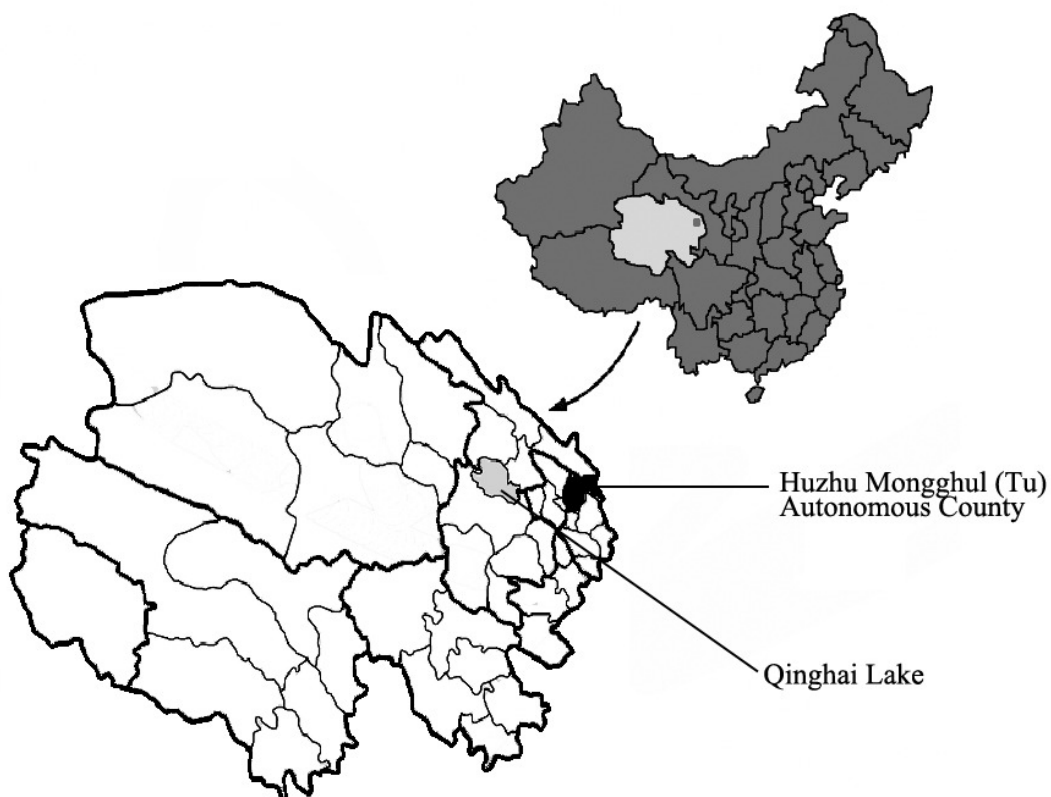
# MAP ONE



## MAP TWO



MAP THREE



## NON-ENGLISH TERMS

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The order of terms is Mongghul (or term used by Mongghul), Chinese characters, *pinyin*, Wylie, and Tibetan. The precise etymology of words in this list awaits further research, given the combinative nature of language (Mongghul, Tibetan, Chinese) in the Mongghul areas.

### A

*aagu*, 姑娘 *guniang*

*aawu*, 哥哥 *gege*, phu bo ཕུ་བོ་

Aijaliin, 二加龙 *Erjialong*

Aloxa, 阿拉善 *Alashan*

Amdo, 安多 *Anduo*, A mdo ཨ་མདོ་

Amiduozaang Shan, A ma'i mdo ri bo ཨ་མའི་མདོ་རི་བོ་

*anzhog*, 安召 *anzhao*

### B

Baghari

Baicha, 北岔 *Beicha*

*bankang*, 板炕 *bankang*

*bayan kun*, 富人 *furen*

*booshizog*

*budaa*, 搅团 *jiaotuan*

### C

Chileb, 赤列布 *Chiliebu*

*chuula*, chos lwa ཆོས་ལྷ་

Cichin

### D

Daban, 达板 *Daban*

Dalansuu, ...mtsho ...མཚོ

Dalapai, 大拉排 Dalapai

Dalaxja

dalen, 搭连 dalian, twa len ཁྲ་ལེན

Dangyan, 东元 Dongyuan

Danjansirang, bstan 'dzin tshe ring བསྟན་འཛིན་ཚེ་རིང

Danjansuu, bstan 'dzin mtsho བསྟན་འཛིན་མཚོ

Danma 丹麻

Danyan, 洛儿沟 Luoergou

Danzhinjansuu, bstan 'dzin rgya mtsho བསྟན་འཛིན་རྒྱ་མཚོ

Darijii, dar rgyas དར་རྒྱས

Darimaa, 丹麻 Danma

Dongcha, 东岔 Dongcha, gdung tsha གདུང་ཅ

Donggou, 东沟 Donggou

Donghe 东和, Donghe

duduna

Duduma

Duluun Lunkuang

Dunzhusirang, don grub tshe ring དོན་གུབ་ཚེ་རིང

Durijinbin

Durijixji, rdo rje skyid རོ་རྒྱེ་སྒྱིད

Durishidii, 多士代 Duoshidai

Durixjisishiden, 董思源 Dong Siyuan

Durizang 阿米多藏山 Ami duocang shan

Duwa Cairang, mdo ba tshe ring མདོ་བ་ཚེ་རིང

Duwa, 多哇 Duowa, mdo ba མདོ་བ

## F

*findin*, 饺子 *jiaozi*

Foorigisigari, hor gur dkar rgyal po ཧོར་གུར་དཀར་རྒྱལ་པོ་

Foorijang, 霍尔俊 Huoerjun

*fu*, 富 *fu*

Fulaan Nara

Fulaan Tirima

## G

Galazang, skal bzang གླལ་བཟང་

Galizangrinqan, bskal bzang rin chen བསྐལ་བཟང་རིན་ཆེན་

Gannan, 甘南 Gannan, kan lho ཀན་ལྷོ་

Gansu, 甘肃 Gansu, kan su'u ཀན་སུ་

Gesar Rjewu, 格萨尔王 Gesaerwang, ge sar rgyal po གེ་སར་

རྒྱལ་པོ་

Ghuaisang, 西藏 Lasa, lha sa ལྷ་ས་

Gindindarijii, dge 'dun dar rgyas དགེ་འདུན་དར་རྒྱས་

Gindirinqan, dge 'dun rin chen དགེ་འདུན་རིན་ཆེན་

*gua*, 呱 *gua*

Guadi

## H

Haidong, 海东 Haidong

*haijee*

*halighii*, 萱麻 *xuanma*

*haliu*, 油炒面 *youchaomian*

*ham*, 长筒鞋 *changtongxie*, sag lham སག་ལྷམ་

Han, 汉 Han

*hanqi shduri*, 狐臭 *huchou*

hanqi, 袖筒 xiutong

Hazai, 下寨 Xiazhai

He Chaoshan, 何朝山 He Chaoshan

hguandii, 苯苯子 benbenzi, dpon དོན་, ngags pa རྒྱགས་པ་

Hgunbin, 塔尔寺 Ta'ersi, sku 'bum byams pa gling སྐུ་འབུམ་

བྱམས་པ་གླིང་

hguriden, 法师 fashi, lha ba ལྷ་བ་, sku rten སྐུ་རྟེན་

Hongyazigou, 红崖子沟 Hongyazigou

Hualong, 化隆 Hualong

Huarai, 华热 Huare, dpa ris དཔའ་རིས་

Huayuan, 花园 Huayuan, me tog ldum rwa མེ་ཏོག་ལྷུང་ར་

Hui, 回 Hui

huni, 羊 yang

Huzhu, 互助 Huzhu

## J

Jiading, 加定 Jiading

Jiloghuali, 互助北山 Huzhu Beishan

Jingang, 金刚 Jingang, rdo rje རྡོ་རྗེ་

Jiransuu, ...mtsho ...མཚོ་

jixijog

Jugui

## K

kadog, 哈达 hada, kha btags ཁ་བཏགས་

Karilang

Kugua Nuuri, 青海湖 Qinghaihu, mtsho sngon po མཚོ་སྔོན་པོ་

Kushinzhang

# L

Lamuniruu

Langja, 浪家 Langjia

langlang

Langshida

Lanzhou, 兰州 Lanzhou

Larang, 拉卜楞 Labuleng, bla brang ལ་བླང་

Larinbog

Larishidang

*lasizi garuu yarashiduu, lab tse dkar po yar la bstod* ལ་སུ་ཙེ་

དཀར་པོ་ཡར་ལ་བསྟོད

*lasizi, 敖包 aobao, lab tse* ལ་སུ་ཙེ་

Lawaa, 拉哇沟 Lawagou

Laxjang

Layahua, 腊月花 Layue hua

*lazii*

Ledu, 乐都 Ledu

Liancheng, 连城 Liancheng

Liminsuu, klu mo mtsho ལུ་མོ་མཚོ་

Limudanzhuhu, klu mo don 'grub ལུ་མོ་དོན་འབྲུབ་

Limusaizhuhu, klu mo... ལུ་མོ་...

Limusishiden, klu mo... ལུ་མོ་...

Limusishiji, klu mo... ལུ་མོ་...

Limuxja, klu mo rgyal ལུ་མོ་རྒྱལ་

Ling, 岭 Ling, gling ལྷིང་

*logxjiima, 花卷 huajuan*

Lu Tusi, 鲁土司 Lu Tusi



Lu, 鲁 Lu

Lughuari, 大菜子沟 Dacaizigou

Luojiawan, 乐加湾 Lejiawan

## M

Ma Bufang, 马步芳 Ma Bufang

Majii, ma gcig མ་གཅིག

Mantuu, 馒头 Mantou, man thu dgon pa མན་ཐུ་དགོན་པ

Mao, 毛 Mao

Marizang, 白马寺 Baimasi, pad ma dgon pa པད་མ་དགོན་པ

Menyuan, 门源 Menyuan

*modaya*, 猫大爷 *maodaye*

Mongghul, 土 Tu

## N

Naja, 纳家 Najia

Nanmenxia, 南门峡 Nanmenxia

Naringhuali, 东山 Dongshan

Nayansuu, ...mtsho ...མཚོ

*nenjengui*, 眼见鬼 *yanjiangui*

*nenzhu*, 年猪 *nianzhu*

Niruu

Niu, 牛 Niu

Njaa, 温家 Wenjia

*nofan*, 熬饭 *aofan*

## O

*o manii banii huang*, oM ma Ni pad+me hUM ཨྲྀ་མ་ཁྱེ་པད་མེ་ཨུཾ

*ohohog ai*, 哦呵哎 *ohao ai*

P

*pang*, 旁 *pang*

*pansan*

*pei*, 土烧炕 *tushaokang*

Ping'an, 平安 Ping'an

*pram*

Q

Qanzua, 前座 Qianzuo

*qarog*, sa'i go l+'a chang rin སའི་གོ་ལྷ་ཆང་རིན

Qasizi

Qiminsuu, chi med mtsho ཆེ་མེད་མཚོ་

Qing, 清 Qing

Qinghai, 青海 Qinghai, mtsho sngon མཚོ་སྒོན་

Qishisan, 七十三 Qishisan

*qulangshidari so*

Qurizang, 却藏 Quezang, chu bzang ལྷ་བཟང་

Qushidentang, 天堂寺 Tiantangsi, mchod rten thang མཚོ་དང་  
ཏེན་ཐང་

Quurisang Srishiji, 花园寺 Huayuansi, dpa' yon dgon དཔལ་འ་  
ཡོན་དགོན་

R

Rashidan

*renming*, 人命 *renming*

Rgulang, 佑宁 Youning, dgon lung དགོན་ལུང་, Dgon-lun,  
Erh-ku-lung, Yu-ning si

Rjanog, 北京 Beijing

Rnqan, rin chen རིན་ཆེན་

Rnqanhua, rin chen... རིན་ཆེན་...

Rnqaxji, rin chen skyid རིན་ཆེན་སྐྱིད་

S

Sangrijijaxi, sangs rgyas bkra shis སངས་རྒྱས་བཀྲ་ཤིས་

Sanjii, 三姐 Sanjie

*sanzi*, 撒子 *sanzi*

Schin

Serihguang, 大通 Datong

Serihguang, 广惠 Guanghui, sgom dpe སྒོམ་དཔེ

Shanxi, 山西 Shanxi

Shba

Shdanzinniima, bstan 'dzin nyi ma བསྟན་འཛིན་ཉི་མ་

*shdaqang*, 上马酒 *shangmajiu, rta chang* རྟ་ཆང་

Shdara, 达拉 Dala

Shdazi, 八古山 Bagushan

Sishijinsuu

Shgeayili, 大庄 Dazhuang

*shua*, 喇 *shua*

Smeen, 西米 Ximi

Songduo, 松多 Songduo

*soquan*, 草圈 *caoquan*

Sughua, 索卜滩 Suobutan

Sunbu Larang, 松布昂 Songbuang, srung bu bla rung སུང་བུ་

ལྷ་བུང་

Sunbu, 松布 Songbu, srung bu སུང་བུ་

Szanghuali, 念先 Nianxian

*szii*, 算卦 *suangua, rtsis* རྩིས་

*szuari*

T

Taizi, 台子 Taizi

*taligha*, 糌粑 *zanba*, rtsam pa རྩམ་པ་

*tangdarihiima*

Tansanliin

Tanshanling, 碳山岭 Tanshanling

Tiantang, 天堂 Tiantang, mchod rten thang མཆོད་རྟེན་ཐང་

Tianzhu, 天祝 Tianzhu

Tughuan, 土官 Tuguan

*tugun*, 院坑 *yuankeng*

*tui*

*tulighui juuligha*, 戴天头 *daitiantou*

W

Wang, 王 Wang

Wariwa Xmerila, 谢媒人 Xiemeiren

Wayog, 瓦窑 Wayao

Wughuang, 巴洪 Bahong

Wutai, 五台 Wutai

Wuuzin 威远, Weiyuan

Wuxi, 五十 Wushi

X

Xangtang, 享堂(民和), Xiangtang, byang thang བྱང་ཐང་

Xangxanbala, 香巴拉 Xiangbala, sham b+ha la ཤམ་བ་ལ་

Xemeri, 西大滩 Xidatan

Xewarishidi, 十八洞沟 Shibadonggou

Xiahe, 夏和 Xiahe, bla brang ལྷ་བརྩ་

Xianmi, 仙米 Xianmi

Xining, 西宁 Xining, zi ling ཟི་ལིང་

Xjirimu

*xjiuniuri*

Xoshidosirang, ...tshe ring ...ཚེ་རིང་

Xralijin

Xranghuali, 沙沟山 Shagoushan

Xuanglang, 松蕃寺 Songfansì

Xunrang, 逊让 Xunrang

## Y

Yehu, 野狐 Yehu

yiizi, 大网膜 *dawangmo*, 胰腺 *yixian*

yikang

Yomajaa, 姚麻 Yaoma

Yongdeng, 永登 Yongdeng

Yongjing, 永靖 Yongjing

*yuan*, 元 *yuan*

## Z

Zalangghuali, 扎龙沟 Zhalonggou

*zan*, *gza'* གཟའ་/ *btsan* བཅན་

Zanghgua

Zangxi

Zankang, *btsan khang* བཅན་ཁང་

Zhamaqii

zhang

Zhaxi, 扎西 Zhaxi, *bkra shis* བརྒ་ཤིས་

Zhualimaa

Zhualimaxji, sgrol ma skyid ལྷོལ་མ་སྒྱེད

Zhunmaasarishiden, sgron ma ...brtan ལྷོན་མ་... བརྟན

## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

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Limusishiden (b. 1968) is a native of Tughuan Village, Danma Town. After graduating from Qinghai University Medical College in 1993 he has worked at Qinghai University Affiliated Hospital as an osteopathic surgeon. Jugui (b. 1969), Limusishiden's wife, is from Yomajaa Village, Wushi Town. She worked for One Earth Design in Xining City in 2010.

